

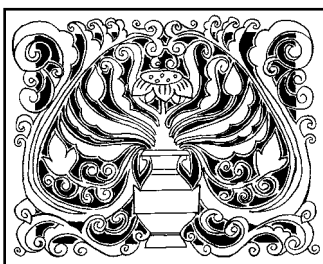


# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

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# TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत । *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*

## Śānti: Peace

July 2007  
Vol. 112, No. 7

ॐ द्यौः शान्तिरन्तरिक्षं शान्तिः पृथिवी शान्तिरापः शान्तिरोषधयः शान्तिः ।  
वनस्पतयः शान्तिर्विश्वेदेवाः शान्तिर्ब्रह्म शान्तिः सर्वं शान्तिः शान्तिरेव शान्तिः  
सा मा शान्तिरेधि ॥

Om. May there be peace in heaven. May there be peace in the sky. May there be peace on earth. May there be peace in the waters. May there be peace in the plants. May there be peace in the trees. May there be peace in the gods. May there be peace in Brahman. May there be peace in all. May that peace, real peace, be mine. (Yajur Veda, 36.17)

ॐ वाङ् मे मनसि प्रतिष्ठिता मनो मे वाचि प्रतिष्ठितमाविरावीर्म एधि वेदस्य  
म आणीस्थः श्रुतं मे मा प्रहासीरनेनाधीतेनाहोरात्रान् संदधाम्यृतं वदिष्यामि  
सत्यं वदिष्यामि तन्मामवतु तद्वक्तारमवत्ववतु मामवतु वक्तारमवतु वक्तारम् ।  
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः॥

May my speech be based on the mind; may my mind be based on speech. O self-effulgent One (Brahman), reveal yourself to me. May you both (mind and speech) reveal the Vedas to me. May not any of the teachings I have heard depart from me. I shall join day and night through this study. The right will I speak. The truth will I speak. May That (Brahman) protect me; may That protect the speaker. May That protect me; may That protect the speaker, may That protect the speaker. Om Peace, Peace, Peace! ('Peace Chant', Rig Veda)

As a mother even with her life protects her child, her own and only son, so let one cultivate [such a] heart without measure towards all living beings. (Sutta Nipata, 'Uraga Vagga', 8)

Sing and hear and put His love into your hearts. Thus shall your sorrows be removed, and you shall take happiness to your homes. (Adi Granth, 'Japuji', 5)

O tranquil soul, return to your Lord, so pleasant and well pleased! Enter among My servants, and enter My garden. (Quran, 89.27-30)

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God. (Matthew, 5.9)

# THIS MONTH

**Practising Peace**, and harmony form the focus of this number. And this has a bearing on issues as diverse as poverty, environmental hygiene, contemplation, and dialogue.

**Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago** records ‘Sri Ramakrishna’s Teachings’.



What is the meaning of harmony in a world thriving on friction? Is harmony possible? Is it desirable? These are some of the thought-provoking questions addressed in the article **Harmony, Inner and**

**Outer** by Swami Vedanandaji, a monastic member of the Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco.

Contemplation is considered the straight path to peace and harmony. What objective results can we reasonably expect from the practice of contemplation? Swami Brahmeshanandaji, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chandigarh, provides the answer in **Fruits of Contemplation**.

Ms Linda Longmire is the founder and facilitator of an interfaith group called ‘The Way of the Heart’ in Halifax. She brings her remarkable insights on inter-religious understanding to bear upon her presentation on **Creating Cultural Harmony: The Spiritual Path of the Heart**.

Mrs Janice Thorup concludes her essay on **A Quiet and Peaceful Life** by sharing her thoughts on how the peace and quiet of retreats can be recreated in our workaday world. Mrs Thorup is a writer and social worker from St Louis.

Swami Asaktanandaji, Secretary, Ramakrishna



Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, and Sri Chandi Charan Dey, Project Coordinator, Water and Sanitation, Ramakrishna Mission Lokasiksha Parishad,

Narendrapur, conclude their presentation on **Sanitation as a Movement: the RKM Lokasiksha Parishad Experience**—the remarkable story of a mass sanitation and safe water supply programme.

The concluding section of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith: Focus on Environment** deals with applied algal research and the activities of Viveka Nature Club. This paper has been jointly authored by Dr V V Subramanian, Dr T S Suryanarayanan, Dr V Sivasubramanian, Dr S Swaminathan, and Dr K Kannan of Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda College, Chennai.

The final instalment of Mrs Alice M Hansbrough’s **Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda** provides some more intimate glimpses of Swamiji in San Francisco. The transcript of these reminiscences has been made available by the Vedanta Society of Northern California. The text has been edited by Swami Chetananandaji, Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of St Louis, and a group of Vedanta students.

The third instalment of Dr Prema Nandakumar’s story on **Kanchipuram, the Four-fold Glory** captures the art, architecture, legend, and spirit of Shiva Kanchi. The author is a researcher and literary critic from Srirangam.



# *Practising Peace*

**I**N his Nobel Peace Prize speech of 1993, F W de Klerk, the last apartheid-era president of the Republic of South Africa, shared some important insights on conditions that militate against peace: (i) Peace does not fare well where poverty and deprivation reign. (ii) It does not flourish where there is ignorance and a lack of education and information. (iii) Repression, injustice, and exploitation are inimical to peace. (iv) Peace is gravely threatened by inter-group fear and envy and by the unleashing of unrealistic expectations. (v) Racial, class, and religious intolerance and prejudice are its mortal enemies.

More than thirty years prior to this, Abraham Maslow had identified a hierarchy of needs that perpetually engage the human personality. These include (in ascending order): (i) physiological needs: food, water, air, warmth, sleep, sex; (ii) security needs: protection from the elements, hygienic environment; job, family, and social security; (iii) love or belonging needs: friendship, intimacies, family, work group; (iv) self-esteem needs: achievement, mastery, independence, status, respect; (v) self-actualization needs: realizing personal potential, finding meaning in life, peak experiences.

Though the lower needs in this hierarchy are more compelling than the higher ones, even a top-rung problem like meaninglessness can leave an individual profoundly disturbed and discontented. Seen against this background, poverty and deprivation are much more ubiquitous than we imagine.

This human predicament is made particularly poignant by the fact that much of our poverty and deprivation is simply due to ignorance and a lack of education and information. The Ramakrishna Mission Lokasiksha Parishad experience, which forms a part of this number, drives home the fact

that focused participatory education and cost-effective technologies can successfully tackle such health hazards as open disposal of human waste, a major problem in many developing countries, and contamination of ground water with arsenic, a significant public health problem in West Bengal and Bangladesh.

The Narendrapur experience highlights two important aspects of the fight against deprivation. First, the massive sanitation programme in Medinipur district was 'self-financed'. Obviously, mobilization of local resources ensures the sustainability of any programme. Second, this resolve for self-financing was triggered by UNESCO's inability to subsidize the construction of 300 toilets in a village community. The better-off sections of society have clearly to do much more to help the underprivileged secure the basic necessities of dignified living. And in our global village, this is a global responsibility.

It is a tragic fact that very many of the apparently legitimate efforts at securing one's rights only add to the iniquities and injustice that plague the poor. Drug manufacturing monopolies that place the cost of treatment of common illnesses beyond the reach of the poor are responsible for a large proportion of the ill being left inadequately attended. Aids is a case in point. In the Indian tradition, intellectual property was something that was not to be traded, though the owner had the right to ensure that it was made available to worthy recipients alone. A more generous sharing of intellectual properties is essential if global iniquities are to be addressed in a more efficacious manner. And the lead in this regard must needs come from developed nations.

This inadequate sharing of knowledge and resources is responsible for much of the 'inter-group fear and envy' and 'unrealistic expectations' that

de Klerk speaks of. This is a significant contributory factor to large-scale violence, whether it be in Bastar or Baghdad. Paradoxically, fear and distrust usually act in a vicious circle so that no party to the conflict is left any better for it.

Unfortunately, for most of the people living in zones of perpetual conflict, violence is the only known way to address conflicts. That is exactly what children get to see and learn while growing up. Similarly, people living under repressive and unjust regimes soon forget about the possibility of a different order of things. The oppressed, given a chance, turn into oppressors. The solution to this too lies in openness and exchange. Peace is something that can be shared as much as the material resources instrumental in securing peace and the notions of liberty, justice, and rights that help preserve peace.

Probably one of the most malignant forms of discord is that engendered by racial, class, and religious prejudice. And of these, religious prejudice can take particularly subtle forms. It has been said, not without justification, that 'without religion, you will have good men doing good things, and evil men doing evil things, but for good men to do evil, that takes religion'. The cloak of holiness and absolutism in which religious dogma is invariably shrouded makes this evil particularly hard to detect or reason out for the adherents of the particular faith. The apparent diversity and contradictory nature of religious opinions and goals also make the problem singularly intractable.

If there is any one issue in religious discourse that Sri Ramakrishna set his face against, it is religious dogmatism. 'Dogmatism is not good,' he would often say. 'It is not good to feel that my religion alone is true and other religions are false. The correct attitude is this: My religion is right, but I do not know whether other religions are right or wrong, true or false.' Or again, 'Don't be dogmatic: never say emphatically about God that He can be only this and not that. ... How can man with his one ounce of intelligence know the real nature of God?'

'True, we cannot know God with our limited intelligence,' one is apt to argue, 'but our scriptures,

being the revealed word of God, cannot surely be untrue!' In this regard Sri Ramakrishna warns us that 'the scriptures contain a mixture of sand and sugar' and that 'it is extremely difficult to separate sugar from sand.' Dogmatic interpretations of scriptural passages therefore do great violence to the cause of peace by sowing seeds of discord and breeding hatred, both consciously and unconsciously.

In her book *Encountering God*, Diana Eck discusses the well-known biblical passage from the Gospel of John, 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father but through me,' which is often cited as proof of Christian exclusivism. 'I am often tempted to take the approach of simply quoting another verse,' says Eck, "'I have many sheep that are not of this fold" (Acts, 10.34) ... The problem with this approach, however, is that the Bible should not be used as an ammunition-belt full of verse-size bullets to be fired off as they are needed. ...

'So I try another approach. If "I am the Way" is the answer, what exactly was the question? I once asked a class of 150 religion students to state it. Nobody remembered the question, but most everyone knew the answer. ... It was the pastoral response to an anxious question. It was poor uncertain Thomas who asked the question that night, as John tells it. It was the last night that Jesus spent with his disciples. ... On that night of uncomprehending uncertainty he [Thomas] asked, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" And Christ answered, "I *am* the Way, ..." It was a pastoral answer not a polemical one. It was an expression of comfort, not condemnation.'

Diana Eck is clearly espousing a pluralist viewpoint here. But her position is distinct from the official dogma of evangelical groups for whom the Christian revelation is unique, and at best, inclusive. Such an attitude that discounts the intrinsic validity of other religious paths is clearly inimical to dialogue, and it is only through dialogue and open exchange that genuine peace and harmony can be fostered. In the interest of peace, such antithetical ideas are best discarded.



# Prabuddha Bharata—100 years ago

## *Sri Ramakrishna's Teachings: July 1907*

### ATMA-JNANA—IX

BETAKE yourself to Chit (Pure Intelligence), to realise the Sat (Eternal Existence).

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TRY to know the Nitya (the Unchangeable), through the Lilâ (varying manifestation).

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MANY are under the impression that knowledge cannot be gained without reading books. But it is better to hear than to read, better to see than to hear. There is a vast difference between reading about Kâshi, hearing about Kâshi, and seeing and living in Kâshi.

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As the hour and the minute hands of a clock come together at the hour of twelve, so, my mind longs to remain always absorbed in Brahman. But as my life is for the good of others, I bring down my mind with great effort, to the consciousness of the outer world.

---

A place was enclosed by a high wall. The people outside did not know what was inside, and four persons determined to find out for themselves by scaling the wall. As soon as the first man ascended the top of the wall and had a peep in, he became struck with wonder, and laughing out, "Ha! Ha! Ha!" jumped in. The second and third men did likewise. Then who

was there to give information about it!

THE Brahman is like the walled place. He, who sees It, forgets his own existence and with ecstatic joy rushes headlong into It, and attains Moksha or absolute freedom. Such are the holy men and liberated saints of the world—like Jadabharat and Dattatraya, who after their realization of Brahman could not come back to preach it to others.

THE fourth and last man arrived at the top of the wall. Though strongly tempted to jump down as the others had done, he resisted the temptation, and coming down the ladder communicated the glad tidings to all the people outside. Such are the Saviours of humanity who see God, and are anxious to share their bliss of the Divine vision, with others. They refuse the final liberation (Moksha), and willingly undergo the troubles of rebirth in the world in order to teach and lead struggling humanity to its ultimate goal.

---

It is an easy thing to say that the world is an illusion, but do you know what that really means? It is like the burning of camphor which leaves no residue behind. It is not even like the burning of wood, which leaves ashes behind. When discrimination ends, formless Samadhi is attained. Then there is absolutely no recognition of I, thou, and the universe.

---

### LEAVES FROM THE GOSPEL OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA (ACCORDING TO M.)

Sri Ramakrishna (talking with Adhar in the northern veranda of his room) said to him:—

You are a Deputy (Magistrate). This post you have obtained by the favour of God. Forget Him not. But know, all have to pass through the same path of death. Here you are for a few days only. This

world is the field of action in which we come to work, just as a man whose home is in the country, but lives in Calcutta, for the convenience of his work. ...

Fix your mind always on God. At first you have to labour but afterwards you will enjoy the 'pension' (compensation for past toil).

# Harmony, Inner and Outer

Swami Vedananda

SWAMI Vivekananda, in his final address at the Parliament of Religions in 1893, issued a rousing call for universal harmony with these decisive words: ‘Help and not Fight’, ‘Assimilation and not Destruction’, ‘Harmony and Peace and not Dissension.’<sup>1</sup> We wish to examine these ideas, which Swamiji imagined to be like banner headlines, with the hope that we can get some insight into this harmony and how it can be achieved.

## ***Sorting through a Pile***

First of all, what is the basis for harmony? Is real harmony at all attainable in this world? To probe even further, is harmony actually desirable, or is there a higher and more developed state to be attained?

Regarding the latter question, an interesting incident took place at the retreat centre of one of our Vedanta Societies in America. This retreat centre is maintained by the brahmacharins and sannyasins attached to that centre. It seems that a fine friendship had grown up among these members, and their interpersonal relationships had become optimal and frictionless. The head of the centre, however, understood the situation in a different way. He deliberately gave them a work assignment that was designed to raise trouble among them in the following amusing way: A large pile of seldom-used materials had accumulated and needed to be sorted through and the unneeded articles disposed of. The head of the centre told Brother A, whom he knew to be very careful and conservative, that he (Brother A) must fully scrutinize each item and that Brother B, whom he knew to be easy-going and liberal, should under no circumstance be allowed to throw away things that might conceivably be useful some day. Next the head told Brother B that Brother A had a

tendency to keep things far longer than their useful life, and that this should not be allowed. Now the two brothers, having been given instructions from these two opposing standpoints, began to sort through the pile, and one can imagine the fun! Needless to say, their previous ‘optimal and frictionless’ relationship was severely strained.

The point is that it is friction that enables us to move at all in this world. We try to make our machines as frictionless as possible, but if we could fully eliminate friction, progress would be impossible. In the same way, for most people, it is discontent and unhappiness that drives them to further advancement. (Of course, too much of that discontent, or if it is of too extreme a nature, has a negative effect and is not under consideration here.) Since human nature is generally a mixture of tendencies, including a significant proportion of inertia, it is friction and disharmony that often pull us out of dullness and rouse us to activity and advancement.

The basis of harmony is a perception, or at least a feeling of oneness, and yet it must be admitted that the very idea of harmony requires the presence of two or more entities. Therefore, from the highest state of knowledge—as described in the Vedanta, in which non-dual realization alone exists—harmony would appear to be relegated to a lower plane of consciousness. So it would seem that the concept of ‘harmony’ has no relevance in the ultimate realization, nor is it actually attainable (or even fully desirable) in the present state of duality and limitation. What, then, is the purpose of this analysis? Why did Swami Vivekananda issue his resounding call to harmony? We shall return to this question after examining the concept of harmony a little further.



### Not Peace but a Sword

It must be remembered that Swami Vivekananda had not wanted to come to this world, this abode of the disharmonious, at all. Sri Ramakrishna clearly explained what he had to do to convince that great sage to enter this arena of fights and discord, this twilight of half-truths and unresolvable conflicts. And equally clear is Swamiji's motive for acceding to Sri Ramakrishna's request. We are told by the Master himself that he journeyed in a vision to a far realm where seven sages sat absorbed, merged in the indivisible reality, and that it was out of love for Sri Ramakrishna, who was himself the very essence of unbounded, universal love, that Swamiji, perhaps the foremost of these sages, silently agreed to descend.<sup>2</sup> The direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna all became overwhelmed when they tried to describe the Master's love for them. Swamiji also became overwhelmed when speaking of the infinite love that the Master had showered on him,<sup>3</sup> and Swamiji in turn himself grew to embody this unlimited divine love. This was confirmed by his brother disciples, who later claimed that no one except the Master loved them as Swamiji did. Swamiji passed this love on to the world, and this is one of the factors that is advanced for his astounding success at the Parliament of Religions, in which he issued this famous call to harmony.

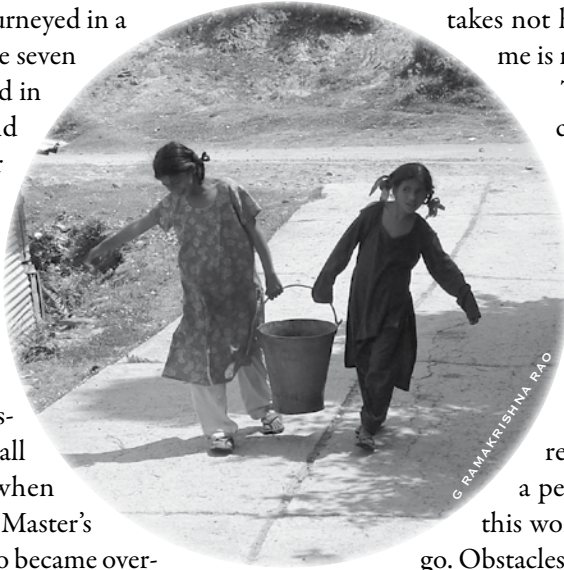
This call for harmony also is prominent in the life and teachings of Christ. While suffering indescribable agonies, Jesus prayed to the Father: 'Forgive them, for they know not what they do.' He told his disciples to feel that same intense and selfless love for each other that he had felt for each of them. 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you'; and, 'Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other

also.'<sup>4</sup> These are incredibly lofty ideals, and we can only stand in awe and amazement at the infinite depth of love that would prompt such a willing sacrifice as Christ endured.

But Christ did not always advocate harmony: 'Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I come not to send peace, but a sword.' Later he explains what he means: 'He that loves ... [relatives] ... more than me is not worthy of me. And he that takes not his cross and follows after me is not worthy of me.'<sup>5</sup>

The point is that this world clings to us as much as we cling to this world. If anyone has an intense yearning to transcend the limitations of this plane of existence and if that person feels the call to renounce all for the sake of attaining to God, for realizing the eternal, such a person frequently finds that this world will not let him or her go. Obstacles are put in the way. At that time, as many monks and nuns will testify, harmony is not the proper course. Then the words of Christ quoted above describe the situation.

Sri Krishna too presents a varied approach to the concept of harmony. In two places, he describes sages as being 'devoted to the welfare of all beings,' but he describes the purpose of his advent as being in part for the 'destruction of the wicked.'<sup>6</sup> Those sages are dear to him 'whom the world does not trouble and who do not, in turn, trouble the world' (12.15); yet, in the vision granted to Arjuna of his universal form, he shows the ultimate universal cataclysm as the inherent nature of reality. Furthermore, although he acknowledges that Arjuna 'speaks words of wisdom' (2.11) in his declaration of his unwillingness to kill his kinsmen, yet Sri Krishna, totally rejecting his arguments as being prompted by unworthy motives, urges him to fight, telling him that if he wins, he will enjoy the earth,





and if he loses, he will go to heaven, which is the promised reward of a soldier killed in battle (2.37).

Swami Vivekananda also indicates, especially in his poem 'Kali the Mother', that in this universe, harmony does not necessarily lie at the centre of things. Nor can one understand this universe rightly if one ignores the inharmonious aspect. 'For terror is Thy name,/ Death is in Thy breath,/ And every shaking step/ Destroys a world for e'er.'<sup>7</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna, during a conversation at Nanda Bose's house in July 1885, presents another aspect of the question of harmony. He says: 'The Divine Mother is full of bliss. Creation, preservation, and destruction are the waves of Her sportive pleasure. ... Some are being entangled in the world and some are being liberated from it.' Nanda Bose interjects, 'It may be Her sweet will, but it is death to us.' To this, the Master replies: 'But who are you? It is the Divine Mother who has become all this. It is only as long as you do not know Her that you say "I", "I". ... nothing exists inside you but the power of God. There is no "I" but only "He".'<sup>8</sup>

The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, though an embodiment of the highest compassion, infinitely solicitous for the welfare of all, has on a few rare occasions also been recorded as assuming that vastness of being in which weal and woe, harmony and disharmony, creation and destruction, all become merged in the infinity of Reality.<sup>9</sup>

And yet, we also know quite clearly that at the deepest level, our soul yearns for harmony. All these views on the different aspects of the question do not satisfy that deep yearning. It is no doubt understandable that the great sages from their most profound realization would view the totality of truth, even its extreme aspects, in such a grand all-encompassing way. Yet we, standing on the same ladder but on a much lower rung with a correspondingly more restricted view, desperately seek an end to suffering at all levels.

Of course the great sages, though able from one standpoint to view all reality impassively from its loftiest aspect, also embody a universal tenderness that causes them to feel the slightest misery of any

being as their own suffering and as excruciatingly painful. They are in fact much more sensitive to the suffering of others than less developed persons. It is this compassion alone that brings them to this world—what other reason can there be to cause such free souls to assume this state of bondage? In Buddhism there is the concept of the Bodhisattva, who vows to work ceaselessly that all beings should enter into nirvana before him.

Swami Vivekananda, in a most amazing conversation with his disciple Sharat Chandra Chakravarty, once expressed this idea in this way: 'What is the good of that spiritual practice or realization which does not benefit others ... ? Do you think, so long as one Jiva endures in bondage, you will have any liberation? So long as he is not liberated—it may take several lifetimes—you will have to be born to help him, to make him realise Brahman. Every Jiva is a part of yourself—which is the rationale of all work for others.' In response, the disciple upheld the traditional view: 'He for whom the idea of the Jiva and the world is a persisting reality may think that without the liberation of all he has no liberation. But when the mind becomes bereft of all limiting adjuncts and is merged in Brahman, where is there any differentiation for him? So nothing can operate as a bar to his Mukti.' Swamiji answered: 'Yes, what you say is right, and most Vedantins hold that view, which is also flawless. In that view, individual liberation is not barred. But just consider the greatness of his heart who thinks that he will take the whole universe with him to liberation!'<sup>10</sup>

### **Seeing the Reality behind Appearances**

So, what is the nature of this harmony that Swami Vivekananda proclaimed on the final day of the Parliament of Religions in 1893? If one wishes to resolve apparently irreconcilable views, one basic method of approach is to rise to a higher level in which those opposing views become the different aspects of a more general principle, thereby losing their antagonistic features. The most general principle that we can apply is the famous dictum of the Chhandogya Upanishad: '*Sarvam khalvidam*

*brahma*; All this is indeed Brahman.’<sup>11</sup> If we take this statement literally, and if we are willing to follow this thought fully to its limits, then we are led to an extraordinary set of conclusions, as Swamiji fully explained, especially in his conversations recorded after his return to India from his first voyage to the West.

For example, in reply to Mahendranath Gupta’s objections that the newly instituted public service activities of the Ramakrishna Mission were in the domain of *maya*, Swamiji’s said: ‘Is not the idea of Mukti also in the domain of *Maya*? Does not the Vedanta teach that the Atman is ever free?’<sup>12</sup> And in her introduction to *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Sister Nivedita describes her understanding of Swamiji’s thought: ‘If the many and the One be indeed the same reality, then ... all modes of struggle ... are paths of realization. ... Life is itself religion.’<sup>13</sup> Swami Brahmananda also is said to have remarked to one of his disciples: ‘Show me the line of demarcation where matter ends and spirit begins.’<sup>14</sup>

If these ideas are true, then we are obliged to live our lives in that spirit. An idea that is not put into practice is an opportunity lost. We are required by these thoughts to live our lives in such a way that every perception is an experience of spirit and not of matter (*pratibodha viditam*).<sup>15</sup> The conclusion then is that it is not matter that stands as a bar to our experience of the spirit, but the deeply ingrained tendency of the mind to become attached to the external appearance rather than to the reality within. It is as if we are watching a movie, being entranced, so to speak, by the movie, taking it to be real, and forgetting that what we are actually seeing is only the screen overlaid with an insubstantial play of lights and shadows which, without the screen, would not be visible at all. If, on the other hand, we learned to focus our attention on the reality within all phenomena, we would see only the light of spirit, the smiling face of God, whom Sri Ramakrishna worshipped as Anandamayi, the blissful Mother.

In this light, all contradictions become resolv-

able. Following this trend of thought, we may think of ourselves as pure spirit, Atman or Brahman, immersed in an ocean of consciousness: a boundless sea of consciousness, such as Sri Ramakrishna experienced in his first vision of the Divine Mother. The analogy that is sometimes used is that of a glass full of water immersed in an infinite expanse of water. If we may stretch the analogy a little, we can go even further and imagine that this ‘glass’ that has water within and without, is itself made, not of glass, but of water—Consciousness alone! Infinity merged in infinity.

### **Working One’s Way to a Higher Harmony**

If this is the reality, how does this resolve all the contradictions and conflicting views mentioned before? Since we may take this limitless, universal consciousness as the goal to be experienced, everything that leads to it is to be encouraged. It must be constantly remembered that the Divine Reality alone exists—call it by whatever name—and multiplicity is only the name of the surface of this ocean of consciousness and is not at all different or even distinguishable from this ocean. It is like the foam that floats on the water, which is actually one hundred percent water only. All human aspirations that emphasize oneness, compassion, and breadth of vision should be encouraged. Everything that emphasizes reliance on the perfection present in the heart of all things, that supports all efforts to perceive the unity underlying all apparent differences, should be encouraged. Life then becomes very positive and dynamic. Harmony with all its implications becomes the attempt to realize, by using the whole gamut of life’s experiences, the inner unity present at the heart of the universe.

Every human activity can be performed in *sattvic*, *rajasic*, or *tamasic* ways.<sup>16</sup> The cry for harmony arises when attitudes or actions that are *rajasic* or *tamasic* in their nature disturb the state of *sattva* or balance that we consider the ideal and desirable state. But we forget that the state of balance is often mimicked by the state of indolence or *tamas*, and that *rajasic* activity is needed first of all to over-



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come indolence before we can proceed to develop the desirable balanced state. We don't always realize that, though 'the fruit of rajas is pain,' and the fruit of tamas is delusion and ignorance, yet 'this my Maya is Divine' (14.16–17; 7.14). There is nothing anywhere in this universe that is not filled with the Divine Reality. The same Gita verse indicates that it is by looking beyond the surface appearance to the divinity within, and devoting oneself heart and soul to that, that one can reach the consciousness of this divinity. Even things that are apparently evil and that are in fact the very opposite of harmonious, things that tend to destroy whatever harmony already exists, even such are divine in nature: 'One who does not hate the effects of sattva, rajas, and tamas when they appear, nor longs for them when they are absent, ... who is not disturbed by these, who is self-controlled, ... is said to have gone beyond these and fitted for becoming (one with) Brahman' (14.22–6).

Harmony that is achieved by the destruction of one of the disharmonious elements does not deal with the underlying forces that gave rise to the disharmony, and therefore prepares the way for a recurrence of the problem. Harmony is to be established, not by the obliteration of that which is disharmonious, but by perceiving the inner reality common to all objects and phenomena. In that way we rise to a higher plane of existence wherein the disharmonious and incompatible elements are viewed as the different parts of a deeper truth. Then the adjustment of these parts with respect to each other can be undertaken and the fundamental causes of the disharmony dealt with.

The age in which we now find ourselves could,

with great justification, be called the Age of Humanity. Humankind as a whole has now taken centre stage. The problems of humankind at all levels now cry out for solution. There has been an unprecedented awakening of consciousness in all parts of the world. Human beings everywhere are becoming conscious of their inherent dignity, of their inalienable right to fully participate in the life and thought of the planet. Narrowness and limited ideas are being challenged. No legitimate aspiration can be denied. Ideas based on limited viewpoints have difficulty in maintaining their authority. The needs of this age are well met by the grand Upanishadic truths that have been discussed here. In this age these truths have been found to be eminently practical. ❧

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# Fruits of Contemplation

Swami Brahmeshananda

**E**VERY person seriously pursuing a contemplative life wants to know, at some time or other, how far he or she has progressed on the path. How should one assess the progress made on this path? Just as secular activities are crowned with success, and our worldly endeavours bear tangible fruits, are there some tangible fruits of spiritual striving? If so, what are they?

This is a perfectly valid query. Just as one needs to have a clear idea about the goal and the path before embarking upon a contemplative life, one must also have some idea about expected achievements. This information becomes all the more important because of the strange and at times erroneous ideas prevalent in this matter. Some people give great importance to seeing light or hearing some sound during meditation. Others talk of the arousal of kundalini, samadhi, ecstasy, and such other experiences. Yet others stress psychic powers. Some consider emotional exuberance or flow of tears on listening to devotional songs as being of prime importance. Some again consider specific physical sensations as signs of spiritual advancement.

It must be remembered that different parameters of progress and different fruits have been described in different contemplative traditions. The fruits of a devotional contemplative life may not be the same as that obtained by pursuing the path described by Patanjali. In this short essay, we shall try to mention only those fruits about which there is no controversy and which can be considered as sure signs of spiritual progress.

## Character

At the outset, it must be clearly understood that it is

far more important to develop an exemplary character than to attain psychic powers. It would not be an exaggeration to say that occult powers have nothing to do with spiritual life. They are a hindrance rather than a help, and a contemplative must remain away from them. The virtues of a person established in wisdom (*sthita-prajña*), or of an ideal devotee, or of a person who has transcended the three *guṇas*—as described in the Bhagavadgita—must be the parameters by which a person leading the contemplative life is to judge him- or herself. If the practitioner is developing equanimity and equipoise even in the midst of such opposites as pleasure and pain or praise and blame, is getting less inclined towards sense enjoyments, is developing compassion towards creatures and devotion to God, then he or she is certainly progressing on the path. It is therefore advisable that one read such descriptions (as that of the ideal devotee) from the Gita and other scriptures daily, and try to lead one's life accordingly.

## Fruits of Contemplation according to Patanjali

The contemplative technique described by Patanjali has three steps, called *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*, collectively termed *saṁyama*. In the third chapter of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*, the results of practising *saṁyama* on various objects have been described in great detail. Most of these meditations lead to psychic powers, which we shall not elaborate upon here. But, apart from these, Patanjali has also described certain important changes which occur in the psyche of the contemplative, and these are extremely relevant.

The *Yoga Sutra*, while describing the fruits of med-

itation on Om, mentions that obstacles to spiritual life are removed and the mind is made introspective by this means: *tataḥ pratyakcetanādhigamo'py-antarāyābhāvaśca*.<sup>1</sup> In the same chapter, mental joy and peace are described as effects of practising values like friendship, mercy, gladness, and indifference (1.33, 47). When the mind develops the capacity of getting concentrated on any object at will, it becomes one, as it were, with the object of meditation (1.42, 43). It has also been mentioned that such a concentrated mind gains a special type of knowledge which is called knowledge filled with truth, *ṛtambharā prajñā* (1.48). We shall now discuss in some detail these four fruits of contemplative life: (i) development of an introspective mind: *pratyak-cetana-adhigama*; (ii) mental peace and joy: *cittaprasāda*; (iii) capacity to become one with the object of meditation: *samāpatti*; and (iv) a special type of knowledge: *prajñā*.

### Introspective Mind

The human mind and senses are naturally running outwards. In the *Katha Upanishad* it is said that the Lord, while creating the senses, made them outward-going and thus killed them. Running after sense objects is equivalent to death of the senses. But the discriminating person, desirous of immortality, turns the senses inwards. An introspective nature and inward tendency of the mind are marks of a discriminating being, a person of steady wisdom, a *dhīra*.

There are two states or modes of mind: the inward and introspective, and the outgoing and extrovert. These two modes of mind are like convergent and divergent rays of light or like the centripetal and centrifugal forces in circular motion. Like convergent rays, the introspective mind is focused on a centre and is therefore a concentrated mind. Sri Krishna calls such a mental mode the *vyavasāyātmikā buddhi*. Being centred on the inner self, the introspective mind can see the various modifications of the mind, intellect, and ego, and the sense impressions as objects without identifying with them. Hence an introspective mind can

easily detect its own deceptions and all its good and bad thoughts.

An introspective mind searches for the cause, while the extrovert mind gets engaged in the multiplicity of effects. The former is synthetic, while the latter is analytical. The former tries to go from the particular to the general, while the latter tries to find the particular in the general. The former seeks unity among the many, while the latter seeks diversity and goes from one to the many.

Sri Ramakrishna has hinted at the movement of an introspective mind thus: 'The sandhyā merges in the Gāyatri, the Gāyatri in Om. A man is firmly established in spiritual life when he goes into samādhi on uttering "Om" only once.'<sup>2</sup> This means that as one searches for the essence of various mantras of the Vedas, one finds that the Gayatri mantra alone suffices for spiritual fulfilment. As one proceeds with meditation on the Gayatri mantra, one comes to realize that its essence is contained in the word *Om*. This is essentially a process of contraction, centralization, and involution or unification, the larger merging into the smaller, and the still smaller.

Most of us begin our contemplative life as extroverts. We delight in the study of diverse literature. We read the Gita, the Upanishads and various commentaries on them, as also the Bible and the religious literature of various religions. But as we proceed, our mind gradually becomes introspective, and we realize that our spiritual purpose can be served with just one scripture—say, the Gita. A stage might be reached in a contemplative's life when he or she realizes that one specific chapter of the Gita is enough to satisfy one's spiritual needs, even that one verse alone can provide enough guidance for the whole of one's contemplative life. Swami Turiyananda began his spiritual life by engaging in detailed study of Vedantic texts like the *Panchadashi*. But finally, in later life, he would meditate on one single verse of the Gita for days together.

In the beginning, a spiritual aspirant delights in listening to and meditating upon the *līla* or divine sport of the Lord. One visits the places of pilgrimage associated with one's Chosen Deity and cele-

brates the days and dates associated with the Deity. As one's mind becomes more and more introspective, one seeks to know the values represented by these events. Finally, one reaches the divine principle of which the holy personality is a manifestation and realizes that the Deity is nothing but the Soul of one's soul. This is how the mind of a true contemplative moves. He or she may begin as an extrovert, but ultimately turns inward and attains union with the Beloved.

### **Mental Peace and Joy**

A constant and natural feeling of peace and joy is the next fruit of a seriously lived contemplative life. The contemplative life is not all struggle and labour. Inner peace obtained by an increase in *sattva guṇa* is the characteristic of a pure and sinless mind. This also arises when the practitioner tries to cultivate the four values of friendship, compassion, gladness, and indifference towards people who are happy, unhappy, virtuous, and wicked, respectively.<sup>3</sup> According to Shankaracharya, blissfulness, supreme peace, contentment, and cheerfulness are the characteristics of pure *sattva guṇa*.<sup>4</sup> The Gita states that one gets great peace and joy on giving up attachment and aversion, likes and dislikes: *rāga* and *dveṣa*.<sup>5</sup> No one can be a true contemplative unless one's passions have been attenuated. And a mind free from passions becomes naturally peaceful and cheerful. In comparison to this cheerfulness, sense enjoyments appear insignificant. This indeed is the *sāttvika* joy described in the Gita, which appears bitter like poison in the beginning since it requires control of the mind and senses (18.37). This peace and joy is different from the highest attainment of *brahmānanda*, the bliss of Brahman, yet it is worth obtaining.

The peace obtained by leading a contemplative life must not be confused with spurious peace which one might get by other means. The Christian mystic Saint Teresa of Avila has described seven such false peaceful states of mind. One may feel joy due to a healthy body and light stomach, especially when the external nature too is pleasant. Secondly,

if there is enough wealth and prosperity and there is financial security one may feel contented and peaceful. There are some who, though not wealthy, feel satisfied if they obtain social status and prestige. And if such a person is engaged in some sort of spiritual practice and performs a little meditation, he or she may feel satisfied and peaceful. In such cases, it becomes difficult at times to realize that one is depending on something other than God.

Spiritual aspirants engaged in sincere spiritual pursuit may also fall prey to false joys or spurious peace. Normally, spiritual aspirants are quite awake to their faults and weaknesses and become extremely sensitive to moral lapses. Even minor moral lapses committed unconsciously make them uncomfortable and repentant. Such feelings of guilt are auspicious signs, though they destroy or disturb the practitioners' peace of mind. But if one disregards such lapses, they would soon become natural; one might then go on committing evil acts without feeling remorse. A person in such a state might remain undisturbed while committing sins. This is a terrible situation and must not be considered a state of spiritual peace! True spiritual joy and peace are attained only after passing through intense unrest and discontent with our present state.

Some practitioners are satisfied with name, fame, and recognition. They are happy if they are recognized as saintly individuals. There are others who, though not hankering after name and fame, hold on adamantly to their own principles and views. They cannot tolerate any opposition to these. These are self-centred individuals, and their peace depends upon their own egoistic satisfaction. Their peace is due to their achievements in the secular or the religious field. This again is not true spiritual peace.

### **Samāpatti**

*Samāpatti* is a technical term used by Patanjali. The pure, sattvic mind of a yogi becomes one, as it were, with the object of meditation. This at-one-ness, getting completely coloured with the content of meditation, is called *samāpatti*, which is a special fruit of a seriously led contemplative life. When a pure



crystal is placed close to a red flower, it too appears red. Similarly, a mind purified by contemplative living becomes one with the object of meditation. Minds of people not leading a contemplative life may at times get totally identified with the object of their love and attachment, but such minds cannot become one with each and every object, which is the case with the mind of an adept contemplative. Such a mind is like a lump of soft clay which can stick to any surface, or can be removed from that surface and be reapplied with equal ease to any other surface.

The illustration of a crystal points to one more characteristic of the mind of a contemplative. Since a crystal is absolutely transparent, a particle of dust or a thin fibre on its surface or within it would be easily visible. Since the mind of a contemplative becomes transparent like a crystal, even a trace of desire or passion arising in it is immediately detected, however minute it might be. And since a contemplative is able to detect such extremely subtle aspects of passions and desires, he or she is able to conquer them too without difficulty.

### **Light of Intuitive Knowledge**

Another fruit of contemplative life is acquisition of the light of intuitive knowledge. Normally we acquire knowledge with the help of sense experience and inferences based on such sense knowledge. Or we get knowledge through books, especially scriptures. However, such knowledge is not complete. 'The Self is different from intellect and body; Self-realization leads to cessation of all sorrow'; such precepts may be learnt with the help of scriptures, but mere theoretical knowledge does not destroy suffering. The faculty by which spiritual truths are directly experienced is called *prajñā*, of which the nearest English equivalent is *intuition*. This is one of the important fruits of leading a contemplative life.

Animals like dogs, cats, and birds have a sixth sense which gives them an indication of impending danger and which helps them escape from threatening situations before it is too late. These faculties are a sort of intuition or *prajñā*, which is related to

their survival instinct. In humans, certain special mental faculties related to one's specific trade or profession can develop. For example, a physician with prolonged practice of his skills as a healer can develop the ability to diagnose a case by seeing a patient from a distance, or by observing the talk and manners or the living environment of the patient. For each of these there may be no explanation available in books. Such a thing can happen in the life of a contemplative too. With prolonged practice, a contemplative gains the ability to grasp spiritual truths intuitively. He or she is also able to understand which places, persons, actions, and situations are conducive and which are harmful to one's spiritual life and is thus able to make the right adjustments. This intuitive insight gradually influences all of one's activities, physical, vocal, and mental. No more does one need to force oneself to follow strict rules and regulations of conduct. They become natural to one's being. Such a person does not take any wrong step.

### **The Real Fruit of Contemplation**

We have tried to describe in short some of the fruits of a seriously led contemplative life. There could be many more and varied fruits that one might obtain as one advances. However, a practitioner must be focused more on the practice than on the results. Laying too great a stress on the fruits might even become a hindrance, drawing the mind away from one-pointed self-effort into self-assessment. One must not stop till the ultimate goal is reached. Contemplation of God is the real fruit of contemplation. The rest of the fruits are like by-products, and a wise practitioner must not pay too much attention to them or give them undue importance. ❧

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# Creating Cultural Harmony: The Spiritual Path of the Heart

Linda Longmire

*Text of a lecture delivered on 16 September 2006 in Halifax on the occasion of the unveiling of a statue of Swami Vivekananda. In the photo, Swami Tathaganandaji, Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society, New York, unveils the statue.*



IT is a privilege and an honour to share my reflections with you on this memorable day to promote cultural harmony and to honour the holy and historic person of Swami Vivekananda. Reading about his life and preparing this talk became a prayer for me. I am deeply inspired by his depth of character and deep spirituality and I am grateful for having been introduced to him.

You must be very proud as a Hindu people to have this profound monk and philosopher within your tradition who manifests your beautiful spiritual values as a means to create peace. He is an inspiration for people of all faiths in his efforts to create cultural harmony through advocating religious tolerance and respect for all spiritual traditions as true and holy. In my tradition as a Christian I would like to call him Saint Swami Vivekananda!

## **The Journey of Compassion**

I believe it is significant to recognize that his gifts of promoting cultural harmony were made available to humanity through the journey of compassion upon the spiritual path of the heart.

Compassion was in Swami Vivekananda's own nature. Even as a small boy he gave his new clothes away to the poor, much to his mother's dismay. Yet word of his kindness spread and the poor gathered under his window as he threw his new clothes out to them. Years later as a young man he considered the simple act of wiping the tears from the eyes of those who suffered to be a *sacred* task. This speaks of his tenderness and compassion rooted in his awareness of God within the simple acts of life. He

did not take the ordinary lightly, but with spiritual wisdom saw life and every person as indeed sacred and to be valued as such. He desired to serve God and humanity by himself *being love*.

Swami Vivekananda, although a brilliant man, bypassed spiritual scholars when seeking a guru. Instead, he was drawn to the heart of the simple yet profound priest, Sri Ramakrishna, who was known to have experienced God deeply within himself. He came to realize that his own life's path lay in serving God and humanity with compassion, rooted in a deep experiential spirituality.

Later on in his life, it was the compassion of another person toward him that allowed the world to hear his address on September 11, 1893: a kind woman in Chicago who found him ragged and hungry and sitting on a stoop brought him to her home, fed him, let him bathe, and personally took him to the Parliament of Religions. This path of compassion is a profound one; it is the spiritual path of the heart.

The call to creating cultural harmony is essentially a call to compassionate understanding and respect, which are fundamental to creating genuine peace. All of our spiritual traditions promote growth in such goodness of heart. It is no accident that there are diverse ways to express our spirituality. It is a gift from God. It is God's design. All diversity is a gift from God: cultural, racial, spiritual.

God's loving nature created diversity out of an understanding of the benefits of the unique individual needs and expressions of humanity. Also, there are rich and diverse ways in which God manifests Godself so that whoever we are, and being true to who

we are, we may come to know and experience God, however we name or understand the sacred Spirit.

### **Sharing Spirituality of the Heart**

My personal interest in spiritually diverse traditions began at a young age: out of love for God and a desire to understand more about God and about how others understood and realized God, I was open to and respectfully curious about the spirituality of others. I immensely enjoyed discussing experiences of interior life and the sense of the sacred and how these influence one's everyday life.

Years later, motivated by this interest, I decided to pursue a diploma in ministry through St Francis Xavier University with the purpose of being involved in some small way in promoting interfaith respect and understanding. I saw it as a means to promote love for God and one another and as a means to promote cultural harmony. I was still studying for my diploma in ministry when the tragedy of September 11 shook our world into the awareness of our grave need to work together to promote mutual understanding of and respect for spiritual diversity if we hope to have peace.

It was just following this tragedy that I was required to choose a practicum experience for my course. I knew for certain that I wished to form an interfaith group and that the 'way of the heart' was the way that I wished to go. I felt that an interfaith group for theological discussion, while immensely important, was not the direction to which I was called. I wished to go deeper into the heart of others who wished to share their innate spirituality born of real experience of life and God. This depth of sharing created friendships. I believed, and still do, that the simplicity of nurturing friendships is one grass-roots path to creating relationships that generate the *willingness* to work for peace.

I called the interfaith group 'The Way of the Heart'. There were seven of us from different spiritual traditions: Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, Native Spirituality, African Orthodox Christianity, Buddhism, and Roman Catholicism. We met once a month for four months during the project, and on completion

of the project we mutually desired to continue to meet. We still gather monthly at my home.

One of the highlights for all of us in our interfaith group is the wonderful sharing of stories. I'd like to share a story of Joanna's, our Jewish friend. It is a story which so beautifully exemplifies the creating of cultural harmony within the simplicity of everyday life. Joanna had been travelling in Honduras over Passover some years ago. She met a Cistercian monk. They were having a friendly conversation during which the monk inquired whether Joanna was celebrating the Passover Seder. When she replied that she did not have the proper kosher foods, this monk, unbeknownst to her, took it upon himself to provide her with what was necessary so that she could participate in her Passover Seder. She was deeply touched by his regard for her spiritual tradition and his concern that she be nurtured spiritually within her own tradition. Joanna, in turn, on the following Easter Sunday accompanied some young orphaned Honduran children to Catholic mass so that she could be a mother's presence and support for them.

Joanna and the monk reveal what is best in the human heart. They demonstrate respect for another's spiritual tradition, born of compassionate understanding, while continuing to honour their own spiritual tradition. We each have unique ways to honour God, and in our efforts to create cultural harmony we need to respect these unique expressions.

I was invited to be with my friend Fatima, who is Muslim, while she and her companion said their sunset prayers, following our closing ceremony for the interfaith project. Although I did not understand the words they spoke, I was deeply touched by the reverence they showed for Allah. I was aware that they honoured God within the context and ritual of their own spiritual beliefs. When they prayed, the room was filled with a sense of the presence of God. It was a very meaningful experience for me. The spiritual path of the heart led us to transcend differences in language, rituals, and concepts, to become aware of our connectedness in the sacredness of the moment.

In the final evaluation of the project, one member

of our group wrote: 'The value of sharing spirituality stemming from one's heart, rather than from dogmatic preaching, was perceived. It was evident from our experience that one's own spiritual faith became clearer when we understood the nature of another's spirituality. The world today needs such cooperation. ... Peace at large can be promoted in this way.'

An instance of this occurred a few years ago when I attended a meditation weekend with Pema Chödrön, a Buddhist nun and abbess of Gampo Abbey in Cape Breton. She is a renowned spiritual teacher and writer. The weekend was held at Mt St Vincent University in Halifax. It was there that I learned the beautiful Buddhist spiritual practice called Tonglen. Its purpose is to help one grow in compassion, particularly towards those to whom we have an aversion. This has helped me to grow: opening my heart, making me a better Christian, and helping me to have a deeper understanding of the compassionate nature and teachings of Jesus.

### **Touching Closed Hearts**

However, we are all aware that being compassionate and open-hearted is not always easy. Our challenge is in facing the opposing forces to cultural harmony such as close-mindedness, judgment, mistrust, and in the extreme, persecution of others who are different.

When I am honest with myself, I must acknowledge that while I am very open with people from various other spiritual traditions, my greatest challenge is in accepting those within my own tradition whom I judge to be close-minded and exclusive. I will share a personal experience of this.

A while ago, while attending a social event within my own faith tradition, a man was pointed out to me whom I did not know and who, it was said, held very rigid beliefs. Shortly, I found him sitting next to me. We did not chat, as he was engaged in a conversation with the man next to him. However, I became aware *at that moment* of a sense of my own mind and heart constricting. It was subtle, but a very real experience for me. It was such a contrast to the openness I had felt moments earlier. I became aware

that my heart and mind were responding to my disposition of judgment towards this man, responding to my self-righteousness and sense of superiority: 'I am open-minded. This man is close-minded.'

My awareness of what was happening so subtly within me at the moment was a gift from God. I realized in that moment that 'I was just like him'. There it was, our common humanity in a shared weakness. Later I took this experience to the prayer of inner stillness, after which I reflected, asking myself: 'What is the antidote to close-mindedness? What would have opened my heart and mind and his?'

I came to understand clearly that it was necessary to see him as he was: my brother. Not an enemy to be battled, but a brother in whom I must seek any seed, no matter how small, of openness and acceptance, and nurture this seed with the water of the spirit of non-judgment.

I hope that in the future when I meet others who I am told are close-minded, I can approach them with humility and a willingness to listen, with compassionate understanding and the desire to move their heart and mind toward openness and acceptance of others by my own openness toward them. What started as an experience of the subtle harshness and judgment within me became, through awareness and prayer, an opportunity to grow in the gentleness of non-judgment and compassion, which are fundamental to peace-making.

Swami Vivekananda was a genuine peacemaker, a holy man of substantial character and spiritual depth. He knew that to change his world he needed to change his interior self. He showed this strength of character even as a youth when he faced extreme poverty after the death of his loving father; he turned to prayer to the Goddess Kali. He did not pray to change his exterior world, but to change himself.

We are each called to do the same. To change our world we must begin with ourselves: from the inside out, grounded in a healthy spirituality. May we ourselves be love. May we ourselves be peace. This is the spiritual path of the heart to creating cultural harmony.





## ***A Quiet and Peaceful Life***

**Janice Thorup**

*(Continued from the previous issue)*

CHARLES SALEMBIER

**H**OW, then, do we bring the kind of ‘quiet and peaceful life’ I lived in Tennessee into our everyday lives, especially if we are householders and bonded to the world through our householder responsibilities? The world pulls at us and has expectations and skewed (though commonly accepted) views of what is normal. Fearing and wanting are the ego’s dominant emotions, and modern culture supports both of them.

Our spiritual guides all tell us that the world has spiritual dangers and distractions. Christianity teaches that the kingdom of Jesus is not of this world—that we should be in the world, but not of it.<sup>9</sup> Vedanta teaches that we live in a phenomenal world of maya, which we must pierce in order to see the underlying reality.

Complete renunciation of the world is not possible for most of us, especially for those of us who live the lives of householders. But we can certainly simplify things. We can prioritize and set limits to our spending, our time commitments, our use of technology. We can create quiet space in our lives—

computer-free days, holy sabbaths. And Vedanta teaches us two great secrets for living in the world without being part of it. The first has to do with our livelihood and how we perform those duties that we are compelled to perform.

### **Work**

In the Gita, Krishna repeatedly encourages Arjuna to fight. At first, this advice seems counter to Krishna’s other teachings—that we should renounce the world, see the Real rather than the unreal, withdraw our senses from their objects. But in urging Arjuna to fight, Krishna is telling him he must engage in the world: he must perform the task in front of him. Vivekananda stresses over and over again the necessity of work—especially ‘such works as are helpful to the manifestation of the knowledge of the Atman.’<sup>10</sup> Vivekananda is here referring to what the Buddhists call Right Livelihood. Thich Nhat Hanh says, ‘You have to find a way to earn your living without transgressing your ideals of love and compassion. The way you support yourself can



be an expression of your deepest self, or it can be a source of suffering for you and others.’<sup>11</sup>

Aside from our livelihood, there is the work that presents itself to us every day as we move through our ordinary lives. Dishes must be washed, food prepared, houses kept clean. And in these jobs, as well as the jobs that provide us an income, the Gita teaches us that we must work without thought of reward. This is made difficult by a culture based on a system of rewards. We get grades in school and salary reviews on the job; we attend volunteer appreciation luncheons. But the Gita asks us to forego all that and to do all that we do for God’s sake, for the sake of the work itself, leaving our egos out of the equation.

Late in December during our sojourn in Tennessee, I planted flats of tomatoes that would be cared for indoors until the earth warmed up enough to plant them outside. I started with seeds and witnessed the always surprising, truly miraculous transformation of a lifeless thing to something that grows toward light, putting down roots in tiny pots of soil—hopeful little things full of promise. They were like children. I moved them around from one room to another to take advantage of the sunshine. I transplanted them as they became root-bound. I fed them with seaweed extract and talked to them. And one day I realized that I would not be around to eat the fruit they produced. I would have left Tennessee by the time the plants produced a tomato.

At the time, I was reading a book by Wendell Berry called *A Place on Earth*. It’s a very long, slow-paced book, set in rural Kentucky during World War II. Rural America in the nineteen-forties was a quiet and peaceful place—tractors had not yet extended the day and reduced one’s reliance on neighbours. The main character in the book is Mat Feltner, who loves everything about the earth and his role in it as a farmer—every task he does with joy. Early one spring, he is pruning fruit trees in the orchard. He finds this task especially joyful because it happens before the frenzy of summertime when he’s never caught up on his work, always hav-

ing to hurry through whatever he’s doing. As Mat prunes, he realizes that he’s not going to be around to see the rewards of this particular labour—it will be years before the branches he’s cutting bear fruit, and he will most likely be dead. But he finds that there is an even greater joy in doing the work ‘for the sake of the land itself’ and ‘for the sake of one who may come later’.

For me as well, there came a greater depth of satisfaction from tending my little tomato plants when I was doing it not for myself, but for the sake of life itself, for my friends and for God. The work became an offering and seemed, of itself, a path to enlightenment.

### **Mindfulness**

In a poem called ‘The Summer Day’, Mary Oliver wonders who made the world—a world that includes ‘the swan and the black bear’ along with a grasshopper ‘who has flung herself out of the grasses’ to eat sugar out of Oliver’s hand. She notices the grasshopper moving her jaws ‘back and forth instead of up and down’; she watches her ‘gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes’. She sees her wash her face with her ‘pale forearms’ and then ‘snap her wings open and float away’. And then Oliver writes:

I don’t know exactly what a prayer is.  
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall  
down  
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,  
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through  
the fields,  
which is what I have been doing all day.  
Tell me, what else should I have done?  
Doesn’t everything die at last, and too soon?  
Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
with your one wild and precious life?

Oliver has identified the second great Vedantic secret to living in the world without losing one’s soul to it: paying attention, mindfulness as the Buddhists call it. The kind of prayer that Oliver is talking about grows out of the mindfulness she exhibits in the first part of the poem where she is concen-





CHARLES SALEMBIER

trating on the grasshopper. She connects with the Divine because she is hyper-aware of what is right in front of her.

If, as we believe, God dwells everywhere—is manifest in everything—then our paying deep attention to anything—even a grasshopper—will bring us to God. Attention is supreme intelligence. Concentrated attention is consciousness itself. Swami Ashokananda advises never allowing the mind to become divided: ‘Whatever you do, make a habit of giving your full attention to it.’ For the scattered mind cannot see God. And when the mind becomes quiet, which it does when it is fully concentrated, God is evident in everything.<sup>12</sup>

I’ll share a personal moment that illustrates this. Our children joined us for a holiday while we were in Tennessee, and we had a wonderful time together. It was wonderful, in part, because there was little to distract us from each other. They adjusted to our quiet and peaceful life within a day or two, and we spent time together not doing things so much as being in one another’s presence. At the end of this visit when our children had left us and were jetting back to their various cities and busy lives, my husband and I took a walk through one of the meadows with the dogs. It was late afternoon—a magnificent late fall day—and the sun turned the long grasses a warm golden colour. The dogs frequently gave themselves over to the smell of the earth—rolling onto their backs and wiggling their legs in the air, joyfully covering themselves with the sweet smell of sun-warmed grass. We were talking of our children and the fun we’d had together when I noticed—all

of a sudden—the sun on the seedpods of the rye grasses.

This small detail captured my attention completely: an astonishingly ordinary and yet beautiful sight. The seedpods glistened in the setting sun and seemed to dance on the ends of their stems. I felt drawn into them or perhaps drawn into a world that contained only these seedpods. I briefly lost a sense of anything else. I could no longer hear my husband talking. Nor was I aware of myself. I felt pulled out of what I knew to be the world into a splendour that was wordless, and beyond conscious thought. It lasted for only a moment in the world’s time, but that moment felt timeless to me.

And thinking back on this experience, it strikes me that this is the fruit of mindfulness. The Divine is right there all the time, have we but eyes to see. When we give ourselves over to something completely and to the exclusion of all else, the world as we know it disappears and that underlying reality reveals itself—blissful, luminous, calm.

### Letting Go of Idols

In Thornton Wilder's *Bridge of San Luis Rey* a monk tries to prove the existence of God by examining the lives of five people who died when the bridge of the book's title collapses. He hopes to find a compelling reason for each of the deaths, which would prove that God had caused the bridge to collapse and for a justifiable reason. He fails, of course, but his inquiries into the lives of the five who died on the bridge lead him again and again to an abbess who runs a convent with a mission of serving the destitute. Two of those who died on the bridge had been orphans in her care. She also houses and nurses the sick and the dying, the blind and deaf and others who have no one to care for them. Each night she goes into 'the rooms of the very sick' to 'say a few words for them to think about when they cannot sleep.'<sup>13</sup> And those to whom she speaks 'lay in their beds [and] felt that they were within a wall that the Abbess had built for them; within, all was light and warmth, and without was the darkness they would not exchange even for a relief from pain and from dying.' This is the sort of woman the abbess was.

The monk's research notes are deemed heretical (the year is 1714) and the monk himself is burned at the stake. The abbess

and her orphans attend a mass in his honour together and during the mass the abbess articulates an important discovery. Wilder writes:

Behind the screen the Abbess sat among her girls. The night before she had torn an idol from her heart and the experience had left her pale but firm. She had accepted the fact that it was of no importance whether her work went on or not; it was enough to work. She was the nurse who tends the sick who never recover; she was the priest who perpetually renews the office before an altar to which no worshipers come. There would be no [one] to enlarge her work; it would relapse into the indolence and the indifference of her colleagues. It seems to be sufficient for Heaven that for a while in Peru a disinterested love had flowered and faded. She leaned her forehead upon her



hand, following the long tender curve that the soprano lifts in the Kyrie. [And she thinks:] ‘My affection should have had more of that color .... My whole life should have more of that quality. I have been too busy,’ she added ruefully and her mind drifted into prayer (102–3).

I would like to point out three things in this passage. The first concerns work. Dona Clara had made an idol of her work—work that was meaningful, necessary, and God-centred. It is hard to find fault with what the abbess had done in her lifetime—served the sick and the orphaned, welcomed the destitute and lonely. And yet she herself finds the fault buried in this glorious work: she has made an idol of it. In this passage, the abbess realizes that ‘it is enough to work,’ that the real value in her work was ‘a dis-

interested love.’ She has come to see her work as an offering, and she has lost the need for the work to continue beyond her participation in it.

The second is the abbess’s lament that she had been too busy. Again, her preoccupation was not of an idle or frivolous sort. She was occupied with humanity, with God’s work. Certainly she was doing the sort of work that Vivekananda describes as ‘manifesting the Atman.’ But she had been too busy in it. She had lost the peace and quiet requisite to a connection with God.

And finally, that last little bit where her mind drifts into prayer. The abbess has torn the idol of work from her heart, she has let go of busy-ness, and then as she listens to the Kyrie, ‘her mind drifted into prayer’. It is as though prayer were her mind’s

natural state from which she had simply been distracted. The prayer into which the abbess’s mind drifted was not, I’m willing to presume, a prayer of supplication or even gratitude. She had, rather, reached that place of deep silence and communion with God.

In this deep silence and in the peace that comes from severing one’s attachments, a quiet and peaceful life is possible. It is both cause and effect, both an agent for God-realization and the result of it. It is the first thing necessary, and it gives as its gift the qualities of quiet and peace—a prayerful communion with the Divine ☯<sup>PR</sup>

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9. John 17:14–15
10. *Complete Works*, 7:222.
11. Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), 113.
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# ***Sanitation as a Movement: The RKM Lokasiksha Parishad Experience***

**Swami Asaktananada and Chandi Charan Dey**

*(Continued from the previous issue)*

## ***Medinipur Chalks Out a New Path***

**T**HE demand-driven sanitation strategy implemented in Medinipur has opened up a new path for promotion of rural sanitation in West Bengal as well as the entire country. The Medinipur sanitation strategy has been recognized as 'model' by the Central Rural Sanitation Programme (CRSP). The government of India has accepted almost all the principles, strategies, and methodologies developed and implemented in the Medinipur sanitation programme for implementation in the countrywide Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) launched under CRSP.

## ***Salient Achievements***

- As a result of this intensive endeavour, household toilet coverage increased to 100 per cent in East Medinipur district (total number of households: 783,623) and 91 per cent in West Medinipur district (total number of households 914,042) by December 2006, against a meagre 4.74 per cent in 1991.
- The incidence of diarrhoeal diseases has come down dramatically in blocks and panchayats with 100 per cent toilet access.
- By December 2006, toilet blocks had been installed in all the 7,376 rural primary schools in East and West Medinipur districts.
- In December 2001, Nandigram II block of East Medinipur district became the first block in the country to achieve 100 per cent household toilet coverage.
- With all its 25 blocks having achieved 100 per cent household toilet coverage, East Medinipur district has applied for the Nirmal Zilla Puraskar (Sanitary District Award) this year.

- More than 30 international delegations from China, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Burma, Nepal, Nigeria, Tanzania, South Africa, and Zimbabwe, as well as from international aid agencies like UNICEF, WHO, DFID, SIDA, AUS-Aid, Water Aid, and World Bank-WSP have paid study visits to RKMLP to understand the innovative strategies and approaches developed and practised in the Medinipur demand-driven sanitation programme.
- High-level delegations consisting of ministers, principal secretaries, heads of public health engineering departments and water boards, and state nodal officers in sanitation from almost all states of India have visited RKMLP to examine the Medinipur Sanitation Programme and learn from it.
- The government of West Bengal is regularly using the expertise and infrastructure available at RKMLP for conducting various training and orientation programmes for the TSC functionaries of the state.

## ***Income Generation in the Medinipur Sanitation Programme***

Till December 2006, a total of 1,156,637 cost-effective household toilets have been installed in East and West Medinipur districts through the PC-RSMS run by the cluster organisations of RKMLP. 374 ma-

*Children  
visit a  
sanitation  
exhibition*



### IEC Material Developed by RKMLP for Promotion of Sanitation

RKMLP developed different types of information, education, and communication (IEC) material to support the demand-driven sanitation programme. The field functionaries of the programme made sizeable contributions in developing the contents of the IEC material, and this ensured its success. The material included the following:

1. Handbook on sanitation for field functionaries (in Bengali and in English)
2. Question-and-answer book on sanitation for field functionaries
3. Flash cards on sanitation and hygiene
4. Technical drawing and design book on construction of sanitation facilities
5. Posters on different themes
6. Folder on sanitation promotion
7. Leaflets on (i) control of diarrhoeal diseases, and (ii) need for household toilets
8. Audio cassettes with 10 songs on sanitation and safe water supply
9. Three motivational video films on sanitation: (i) *Jeevan Patua* (Life Artist), (ii) *Aar Deri Noy* (No More Delay); and (iii) *Mukti* (Freedom)
10. Pictorial calendar on sanitation and hygienic practices
11. Banner on different toilet designs (with scope for upgradation), and messages on hygiene

sons (234 men and 140 women) were engaged in the production of reinforced cement concrete (RCC) platforms and cement mosaic pans with water traps in 54 production centers. One of the most encouraging features of this sanitary movement was the gradual development of a local employment, manufacture, and sales sector based on a previously unwanted consumer item, the household toilet.

There were other remarkable welfare offshoots too. All the masons engaged in production activities have put their children in schools. Almost all women masons have opened recurring deposit accounts in their local banks and post offices. They are using the lion's share of their earnings for providing their children with education and nutrition, building their own houses, and starting small businesses for the economic rehabilitation of their grown-up sons and daughters.

A sum of Rs 93 million has been expended as wages and incentives for masons and motivators working directly at the community level.

### Sanitation Programmes in other Districts of West Bengal

11 cluster organizations of RKMLP are directly involved in the Total Sanitation Campaign in 20 blocks of South 24 Parganas, North 24 Parganas, Nadia, Murshidabad, Bardhaman, and Howrah districts of West Bengal. These cluster organizations have installed about 750,000 household toilets in the state in the last 8 years.

### Community-based Maintenance of Drinking Water Sources

RKMLP has also been actively involved in drinking water supply programmes for more than two decades. Community-based maintenance of drinking water sources as conceived and practised by the Parishad has been appreciated by different agencies. RKMLP installed 800 handpumps in Medinipur and 120 handpumps in Bankura, South 24 Parganas, and North 24 Parganas districts. All these handpumps are maintained by the community. Water users' committees, each with seven members,





**Wages and Incentives Paid**

Activities undertaken	No. of units installed	Payment per unit (Rs)	Amount paid (Rs)
Construction of cement mosaic pans and water traps	1,156,637	12.50	14,457,963
Construction of RCC slabs	1,156,637	18	20,819,466
Fixing of pan and trap with RCC slab at installation site	1,156,637	5	5,783,185
Transporting slab and pan from production centre to installation site	1,156,637	25	28,915,925
Motivators' incentive	1,156,637	20	23,132,740
Total	1,156,637	80.50	93,109,279

have been formed for every handpump installed by RKMLP. Each of the families utilizing the pumps contributes 10–12 rupees annually towards the operation and maintenance of the handpumps. Two trained women volunteers from the locality look after the maintenance of each pump. This strategy influenced Medinipur Zilla Parishad to introduce community-based maintenance systems for handpumps installed by the panchayats too.

**Water Quality Surveillance Programme**

In recent years, quality of drinking water has been given high priority by the development sector. RKMLP has taken up water quality surveillance activities as part of its integrated development initiative. The Parishad has established 17 water-quality-testing laboratories, including one on the premises of RKMLP at Narendrapur, with the support of the government of West Bengal and UNICEF, to test for various quality measures including levels of arsenic and fluorides. 14 of these laboratories are located in the Medinipur districts and 3 in South 24 Parganas. Generating awareness about safe drinking water and its access, and collecting

water samples for laboratory testing, are carried out through the sanitation network developed in the districts. The services of these laboratories are also made available to the general public, and even private tube well owners are making use of them.

**Development of Arsenic and Iron Removal Filters**

Large areas of West Bengal and Bangladesh have unacceptably high levels of arsenic in ground water, and drinking water from tube wells and hand pumps on a regular basis in such areas can lead to chronic arsenic toxicity. The iron content of ground water is also high in many areas. In collaboration with UNICEF, RKMLP has developed cost-effective and highly efficient arsenic and iron removal filters. These are being marketed through the sanitary mart network in West Bengal. The arsenic removal filter costs Rs 450, the iron removal filter, Rs 250. The government of West Bengal and UNICEF have entrusted the Parishad with the responsibility of providing technical training for the production of filters. The sanitary marts are providing the social-marketing support for promoting these filters in areas with high arsenic and iron content in the drinking water. RKMLP regularly holds seminars, group meetings, and personal contact drives on water quality and surveillance in the villages of West Bengal.

*From left: a woman studies a water-filter user's manual; a gram pradhan from Orissa vows to bring full sanitation to his village; sanitation activists learn about water filters; a primary school toilet*





### Recognition by the Government of India

- The Medinipur demand-driven sanitation programme has been recognized as a 'model' for promotion of the Central Rural Sanitation Programme in India.
- In recognition of its pivotal contribution to the sanitation movement, the Department of Drinking Water Supply, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, has included Ramakrishna Mission Lokasiksha Parishad, Narendrapur, in the following committees of CRSP: (i) National Scheme-sanctioning Committee for Total Sanitation Campaign; (ii) National Review Mission for TSC and Swajaldhara (rural drinking water supply) programmes; and (iii) National Screening Committee for Nirmal Gram (sanitary village) Award.
- In 2004–05 the Department of Drinking Water Supply also recognized RKMLP as one of four Key Resource Institutes for capacity development of key functionaries involved in the Total Sanitation Campaign. In this capacity, RKMLP has (i) organized 13 orientation-cum-exposure programmes (each of 5-day duration) for 249 key TSC functionaries of Orissa, Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Arunachal Pradesh, and Nagaland; and (ii) extended support for strengthening capacity in cost-effective production of cement mosaic pans with water traps and other toilet components to the states of Orissa, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Bihar. 390 masons and junior engineers have also been trained as part of this programme.

### Documentation

RKMLP's sanitation experiments have been documented by different national and international

agencies for the benefit of others. One such documentation has been carried out by eminent writer Maggie Black in collaboration with Rupert Talbot and published in *Water: A Matter of Life and Health* (Oxford, 2005). In the chapter 'Not Just Water: Sanitation Too' the authors write: 'The Ramakrishna Mission became convinced as a result of this experience that toilet provision could be done with no subsidy at all, so long as educational motivation through community organizations was effective. ... Fast forward to 2002, and we discover that the groundwork set in place by the Ramakrishna Mission has become the platform for an extraordinary success—for which the Mission credits the government and the panchayats of recent years.'

### National Award

Ramakrishna Mission Lokasiksha Parishad of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, was awarded the prestigious Nirmal Gram Puraskar (Sanitary Village Award) by the government of India in recognition of its commendable contribution to the promotion of rural sanitation in the country. On 23 March 2006, in a function organized at Vijnan Bhavan, New Delhi, by the Department of Drinking Water Supply, Dr A P J Abdul Kalam, President of India, handed over the award to Swami Asaktananda, secretary of the ashrama.

### Only the Beginning

Swami Vivekananda wanted to inculcate self-reliance among people while involving them in the process of development. He insisted that meaningful education was to be brought to people's doorsteps and that they were



From left: village women receiving hands-on training in care and maintenance of water pumps; women masons manufacturing water filters; inset: completed filters

## Not Just Water, But Sanitation Too

India abounds in home-grown organizations with very particular characteristics to which the all-encompassing label 'NGO' does not do justice. The Ramakrishna Mission, based at Narendrapur close to Kolkata, is an organization with its own spiritual cadre, as well as an extensive network of dedicated development outreach workers and volunteers. The Mission is devoted to spreading the inspirational words and deeds of Swami Vivekananda, follower of Sri Ramakrishna, a nineteenth century sage. The Swami, who was active at the turn of the twentieth century, had a particular theology of development which was quite visionary for its time. He believed that rural people's own skills and capacities should be built up so that they could stand on their feet, pursuing their own salvation through hard work and spiritual strength.

The Swami's devotional successors would not like to couch this in political terms, but it nonetheless represents a very different vision of development to that of Jawaharlal Nehru and his political successors. Its ideological connections are much closer to Gandhi's ideas of self-development and enlightened village rule. The objective of both spiritual and developmental personal growth is synonymous with what today would be termed 'empowerment', for the Ramakrishna Mission tried from the outset to change mindsets by a strong emphasis on education of all kinds and to build viable democratic institutions at the grass roots. This was not envisaged as an alternative to government service provision but, on


the contrary, as an effort where the two should come together and work in tandem.

The Mission's strategy was to reactivate and restructure local organizations, especially women's and youth clubs, democratizing them, and training their members. They gave spiritual direction to the Swami's moral teachings as well as practical inputs: management skills, non-formal education, and vocational and entrepreneurial expertise to discourage young people from leaving the moribund rural economy for the bright lights of Kolkata. The organizations were registered as legal societies and bound together in 'clusters', so that there was a representative hierarchy for self-management and supervision. These interacted with the panchayat institutions—strong in West Bengal—and the administrative bodies: block officials and district magistrates.

These networks of organizations, especially the youth clubs, were part of the essential groundwork for the intensive sanitation programme launched by the Ramakrishna Mission in 1990, with UNICEF support and state government approval. ...

The Ramakrishna Mission became convinced as a result of this experience that toilet provision could be done with no subsidy at all, so long as educational motivation through community organizations was effective. No organization was better placed to try out this strategy and make it work.

—Maggie Black and Rupert Talbot, *Water: A Matter of Life and Health* (Oxford, 2005), 108–9.

to be provided with opportunities to take their own decisions on development. In his writings, he emphasized that even if the entire wealth of the world were to be poured into a village, if the people were not motivated to change themselves, no development could take place. The sanitation initiatives of RKMLP have attempted to inculcate self-reliance and create scope for people's direct participation, thus putting into practice Swamiji's teachings and also achieving success to a large measure. We are still to go a long way to make this process sustainable and to practise it in other spheres of development. 

Swami Asaktananda, Swami Prananda, and Chandi Charan Dey receive the 'Nirmal Gram Puraskar' from Dr A P J Abdul Kalam



# Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith: Focus on Environment

Dr V V Subramanian, Dr T S Suryanarayanan, Dr V Sivasubramanian,  
Dr S Swaminathan, Dr K Kannan

(Continued from the previous issue)

## Phycoremediation: Eco-friendly Management of Effluents

VIAT has been involved in projects on effluent treatment employing microalgae, a process popularly called *phycoremediation*, which is a natural and eco-friendly way of treating effluents for safe disposal. For example, to treat acidic water, large amounts of buffering material such as caustic soda are traditionally added to reduce the acidity. In phycoremediation, instead of adding chemicals, algae are inoculated into the polluted water, and these increase the pH through biological means. This is both eco-friendly and cost-effective.

Phycoremediation may broadly be defined as the use of macro- or micro-algae for the removal or biotransformation of pollutants—including nutrients and xenobiotics—from waste water, and carbon dioxide from polluted air. Presently, phycoremediation is applied in three major ways: (i) nutrient removal from municipal waste water and effluents rich in organic matter; (ii) removal of nutrients and xenobiotic compounds from industrial effluents with the aid of algae-based biosorbents; and (iii) treatment of acidic and metal waste waters.

VIAT undertakes feasibility studies under labo-

### VIAT-Industry Partnerships

**STAHL, Chennai:** STAHL is one of the world's largest suppliers of leather-processing products. VIAT has signed a memorandum of understanding with STAHL to treat its factory effluent using algal technology. The effluent is collected in a tank and aerated, and is then sent to a filter press to remove solids. The filtrate is again sent to an aeration tank and is then used to water gardens and lawns. Tons of non-disposable solid waste had accumulated at the STAHL factory over the last five years. The plant effluent also has residual pigments and heavy metals such as copper, zinc, chromium, cadmium, lead, and nickel. Laboratory trials conducted on the effluent resulted in the identification of eight microalgae that grew very well in the effluent. These included *Chlorella*, *Oscillatoria*, *Phormidium*, *Scenedesmus*, *Chroococcus*, and *Spirulina*. Of these, the first three were isolated from the effluent itself. With the use of these algae the entire sediment obtained from the effluent was converted to algal

biomass. Several heavy metals were also removed by the algae. Based on these results, it was decided to use the raw effluent itself, without any prior anaerobic digestion, for algal inoculation in further field trials. Since cadmium and lead are not removed by these algae, it was decided to use chelators like Ethylene-diamine tetra-acetic acid (EDTA) to render these metals water soluble and thus available for bio-removal. A compressed air pump was installed to aerate the culture and enhance the whole process.

**Wheels, Chennai:** Wheels is a leading Indian manufacturer of steel wheels for transport vehicles, tractors, and construction equipment. This factory generates effluents and sludge containing chrome, alkali, paint, and phosphates. VIAT is conducting field studies to identify microalgal forms—other than the well tested *Chlorella* and *Chlamydomonas*—that can handle this effluent and sludge most effectively.

ratory conditions as well as at field level and suggests appropriate algal technology to treat effluents. Over the years, VIAT has developed a culture collection of potentially valuable microalgae and also the technology to successfully employ them in the field with a very high level of success. In addition, VIAT provides expert technological guidance for proper utilization of the biomass generated through phycoremediation. It also shares its expertise by conducting national-level symposia and workshops on algal technology. One such symposium on 'Algal

Biodiversity and Its Role in Bioremediation' was held at our campus from 23 to 25 September 2006.

VIAT has also been receiving queries and consultations from industries across the globe. Nichi-In Biosciences, an Indo-Japanese joint venture company, has signed a memorandum of understanding with VIAT to work on various aspects of polymer degradation by microbes. VIAT is collaborating with the Department of Civil Engineering, Colorado University, Denver, to work on production of bio-diesel from microalgae. It also has a collabora-

**Nichi-In Biosciences, Chennai:** VIAT is collaborating with this Chennai-based Indo-Japanese firm on a multifaceted research project to (i) develop technology for the production of environment-friendly plastics, (ii) develop polymers useful for water conservation in agriculture and horticulture, and (iii) find ways to safely dispose of plastics using microbes. Central to these areas of research is a novel polymer called Sky Gel.

Sky Gel was developed by Professor Mori Yuichi's team at Waseda University, Tokyo. It is remarkable for its water-conservation properties. It swells to two-hundred times its volume on being irrigated with water, and when mixed with soil can keep releasing this water to plants. This polymer is now approved for use in roof-top gardens as well as for agriculture in Japan. This is a very appropriate technology for cultivation in arid places. Studies have shown that regular watering may not be necessary for lawns, and irrigation frequency can be reduced in horticulture sites when Sky Gel is added to the soil.

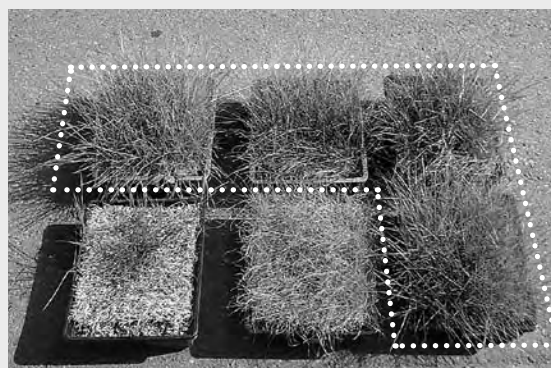
VIAT has found that Sky Gel can be used to enhance microalgal growth and sustenance. Sky Gel's efficacy in enhancing bioremediation of industrial effluents has also been studied by VIAT. Bioremediation is facilitated both qualitatively and quantitatively by the addition of Sky Gel to industrial effluents, even at very low concentrations. VIAT recommends the use of Sky Gel for microbial cultivation and maintenance and also for bioremediation.

Sky Gel can function for a period of up to four years when added to soil. In the soil it gets gradually decomposed by the action of ultraviolet rays and microorgan-

isms, releasing carbon dioxide and water in the process. The residue functions as normal soil. So this is a very environmentally-friendly compound.

Sky Gel can be used with many different kinds of fertilizers (liquid, granulated, and the like) and is compatible with a host of agricultural chemicals and herbicides.

For the past one year our collaborative research has focused on (i) biodegradation of polymers, (ii) stability of water-conserving HYMEC (Hydro Membrane Cultivation) membranes under Indian aquatic conditions, and (iii) use of Sky Gel for cultivation of microbes and in bioremediation of effluents and waste waters. The first two projects are nearing completion and await the approval of the scientific community. The results with Sky Gel which were presented at the national symposium on algal biodiversity at Chennai in September 2006 were appreciated by the scientific and industrial community both for their research potential and economic benefit.



*Grass growth: in Sky Gel mix (with stippled border), and in commercial soil, after two weeks without watering*

tive project with CLRI (Central Leather Research Institute, Chennai) to develop technology for bioremediation of effluents from leather industries.

**Phycoerythrin production:** The VIAT team made an important breakthrough in producing large quantities of phycoerythrin pigment from microalgae at the field level. Phycoerythrin is a water-soluble protein-bound pigment derived from cyanobacteria. This pigment is a valuable commercial product used in medical diagnostics, food-colouring, and cosmetics. Fifteen days of phycoremediation using cyanobacteria makes the entire effluent pink. We are currently standardizing protocols for cheaper and more efficient ways of extraction and purification of phycoerythrin from treated effluents.

### Viveka Nature Club

Viveka Nature Club, affiliated to the World Wide Fund (Nature) India, was started at the Vidyapith in August 1992 with a view to instilling and fostering interest in nature activities among students. Dr S Swaminathan and Dr K Kannan of the Department of Advanced Zoology and Biotechnology act as advisors to club members.

Important club activities include lectures and discussions on nature issues; field trips to nature reserves and wildlife sanctuaries; small-scale research projects on faunal distribution; and participation in nature camps, wildlife census, zoo clubs, and zoo school programmes conducted by Arignar Anna Zoological Park.

Club members actively participate in nature camps organized by WWF (Nature) India at the Indira Gandhi National Park (Annamalai Hills). Members are trained in bird watching

*Dr M S Swaminathan  
signing the visitors'  
book at the Vidyapith*



at Sembium, Nilapattu, and Vedanthangal bird sanctuaries. They also take part in the deer census organized by the Tamil Nadu Forest Department at Madras Christian College and Guindy Deer Sanctuary.

World Animal Day and Wildlife Week are celebrated every year by organizing guest lectures, informative exhibitions, and student competitions on wildlife. Student members are encouraged to conduct faunal surveys with special reference to insects and birds at Nanmangalam Reserve Forest, Guindy Sanctuary, Indian Institute of Technology (Chennai), and other nearby reserves. Students have regularly participated in the wildlife week competitions conducted by the Tamil Nadu State Forest Department, and have won many prizes.

Several members of the club have gone on to become wildlife researchers and photographers and also faculty members at the Forest Research Institute, Dehra Dun. Dr N M Ishwar, a distinguished alumnus of the club, has established the Group for Nature Preservation and Education (GNAPE) at Chennai.

The services of the club to the cause of nature study were acknowledged and its members felicitated by the renowned agricultural scientist Dr M S Swaminathan at a special meeting organized by WWF (Nature) on 6 September 2005. Such appreciations have helped the club grow stronger, with more students enrolling and members undertaking fresh creative and conservation activities.

*[This article was communicated by Swami Satyapriyananda, former Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Chennai, who was also chairman of VINSTROM and VIAT. —Editor]*

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Viveka Nature Club: campaigning for conservation of turtles, left; birds sighted at Vedanthangal Sanctuary, below left; exhibit on aquatic life forms, right



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## Small is Beautiful

(1) Just came from the car salon. Some lawyer is interested

(2) Those rich guys hardly ride us. Just keep us to show others

(3) Well, that's our value, you know!

(5) Hey, watch out! Don't get dirt on me!

(4) Wheee! Hi guys!

(6) Hey! Why do you look so sad?

(7) Oh, they look so shiny, so big! I am so small! I have no value.

(9) But they are so big ...

(8) Come on! We are all just a mass of iron, run with energy. When our body is worn out, the battery is taken out and our iron is melted down!

(10) That does not make you less important. Believe in yourself. You will do your best as you are designed.

(11) Look Pat! Those big cars! Wow, they look great. But they are not for me!

(12) When I grow up, I will buy this car.

(13) Wow! This is just the one I need. Less energy needed, and no parking problems. Thanks Mom!



# Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda

**Mrs Alice M Hansbrough**

*(Continued from the previous issue)*

**D**ID Swamiji ever express any opinion about San Francisco and his work here?

‘He thought that he got a better response here than he did in Los Angeles. And he was much more jolly here: he could see the end of his work after he had come here and had succeeded in collecting some of the funds he sought, and I think this helped to lighten his heart. Personally, I think he would have had even better response if B Fay Mills had managed his visit for him. Mills was an astute businessman. Sometime later he went to Los Angeles and founded a group he called [?] Fellowship. The membership at one time rose to three thousand members, and he actually persuaded the businessmen to close their offices not only on Sunday but on Wednesday in addition!’

‘How did Dr Logan come into the work?’

‘I don’t remember just when he first became interested, but he was present the night the San Francisco lectures closed. The Wollbergs were there, but I don’t remember whether the Allans were or not. We had asked a

Mr Chambers to invite any to stay at the close of the lecture who would be interested in continuing the study of Swamiji’s teachings. He did this, and when the others had left he asked me to tell about the organization of the Los Angeles and Pasadena centres. Then we discussed the or-

ganization of a centre here, but did not complete the arrangements that night. Dr Logan then suggested that we meet the next night in his office at 770 Oak Street, which we did, and it was on that night, April 14, 1900, that the organization of the Society was completed. Swamiji later held some classes there, and he also held some there after he returned from Camp Taylor [in mid-May].’

‘That means, just before he returned to the eastern states?’

‘Yes, we went to Camp Taylor from Alameda; then Swamiji spent a few days [two weeks] in San Francisco, at Dr Milburn Logan’s home, 770 Oak Street, before he took the train on May 30 to Chicago and New York.

‘Well now, did Swamiji express any opinion about the proposed organization [of a Vedanta Society] in San Francisco?’

‘No, he didn’t. The object of the Society was simply to keep in touch with his work, and the money which came in was to go to his work. He simply suggested that meetings should be held in someone’s office.’

‘What sort of man was Dr Logan?’

‘He was a man of middle age at that time, and apparently devoted to Swamiji. He was very helpful to him. But when Swami Trigunatita came to take charge of the Society, he forced Dr Logan out of the work, because he said the doctor was in it for “name and fame”. Swamiji seemed to like all peo-



*Swami Ashokananda, 1940*



*Dr Milburn H Logan*



*Japanese Garden, Golden Gate Park, c. 1902*

and rose from the table. Of course we went home. Mr Neilsen was very disappointed because he knew the Chinese who owned the restaurant; but Swamiji later explained that it was because of the character of the cook that he was unable to eat the food. One other such oc-

ple. He was most compassionate; it seemed as if he never saw distinctions between people—almost as if he didn't see the difference between a duck and a man! He felt that he had come to the West for two purposes: to deliver a message and to get help for India. But he was terribly disappointed in the amount of help he got.'

'Well now, you spoke of Swamiji's going out during the day in San Francisco. What places did he visit besides Golden Gate Park?' Swami Ashokananda asked.

'There were not a great many, but I think he visited the Cliff House, and he often went to Chinatown. For some reason, incidentally, he had a fascination for the Chinese. They would just flock after him, "shaking themselves by the hand" as the saying went, to express their pleasure at his presence. Mr Charles Neilson, a well-known artist who lived in Alameda and who became an admirer of Swamiji, invited us to have dinner one evening in Chinatown. We sat down and ordered, but the food had no sooner been put on the table than Swamiji said he could not eat it,

currence took place when we had had fried shrimps somewhere. When we got home Swamiji vomited his dinner. I said fried shrimps were always hard to digest and probably these were not good, but he insisted that it was the bad character of the cook that was responsible. "I'm getting like my master," he said. "I shall have to live in a glass cage."

'Did he ever seek any amusement? For example, did he ever go to the theatre?'

'He went to the theatre once in Los Angeles to a play, but generally speaking he never sought entertainment, such as playing cards. He did enjoy going out to dinner. He went out to dinner several times with Mr Neilson, the artist, who also took Swamiji to an exhibition of his paintings at the Hopkins Art Gallery, where the Hotel Mark Hopkins now



*Chinatown, San Francisco, 1898*

stands on Nob Hill.

‘Speaking of dinner reminds me of an incident one evening just as we were preparing dinner in the Turk Street flat. A Mrs Wilmot, a Theosophist who had been coming to Swamiji’s lectures, phoned and asked Swamiji if he could come to see her. She said she felt she was losing her mind, that she was having trouble with the “elementals”, whatever they were. She was very anxious for Swamiji to go right over to her home. “No,” Swamiji said, “we are just preparing dinner. You come over here. Bring the ‘elementals’ and we will fry them for dinner!”’

‘What was the play that Swamiji went to see?’

‘It was a comedy which was a great hit at the time, called “My Friend from India”. It was written, as a matter of fact, as a result of Swamiji’s visit to the United States, though it had no real bearing on his actual activities here. The plot revolved around a wealthy family consisting of a man and his wife, their son and two daughters, and an unmarried sister. They became interested in a man from India, a “wearer of the yellow robe” as he was called, who had come to the West to teach Indian religion; and the whole family took to wearing yellow robes. The play was concerned chiefly with the night of a party to which the family had been invited. At the last minute the women discovered that they had all bought the same model yellow gown for the party. When they came home afterwards, the son tried to sneak a tipsy friend quietly to his room to put him to bed, by disguising the friend in his yellow robe and introducing him as the “friend from India”, a bit wobbly from too much meditation! A Christian minister who was trying to make love to the maiden aunt also tried to get into the house disguised as the “friend from India”, and the father finally concluded that he had lost his mind because he was sure he saw too many yellow robes and too many “friends from India”.

‘It was Professor Baumgardt who invited Swamiji,

and a party of us went together. The play was really very funny, and Swamiji enjoyed it hugely. Professor Baumgardt said he had never seen anyone laugh so hard or so much as Swamiji did.’

### **May 4, 1941**

Several weeks passed before Swami Ashokananda again had an opportunity to talk with Mrs Hansbrough of her days with Swamiji. However, on the fourth of May, Sunday, she once more accompanied him on a drive en route from his morning lecture at the Century Club Building. The talk turned to the emphasis some preachers put upon sin and the devil, rather than upon God, and Mrs Hansbrough said that Swamiji had told those in his meditation class that they should try to think of themselves as related closely to Kali or Shiva, or to whomever they meditated upon.

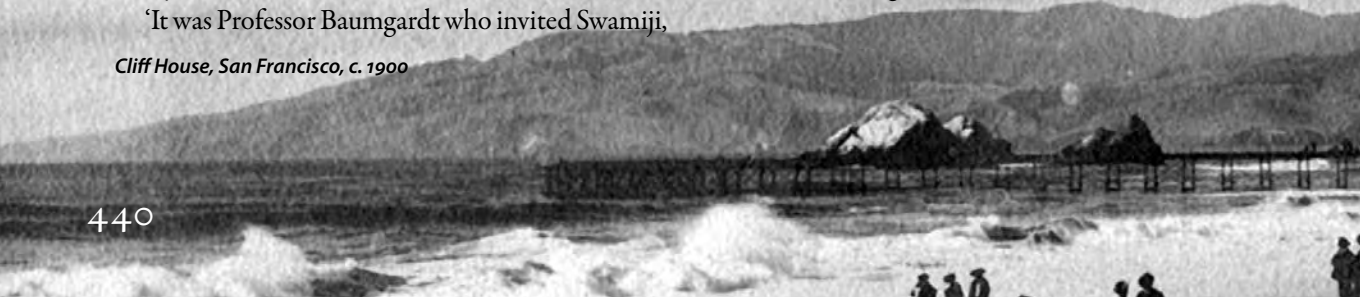
‘Did Swamiji hold a meditation class?’ Swami Ashokananda asked.

‘He always held a meditation period at the beginning of his classes,’ Mrs Hansbrough replied, ‘but I wouldn’t call that exactly a meditation class.’

‘Well, how long would he meditate? Very long?’

‘No, I should say fifteen minutes or half an hour. I remember one class particularly. When we were in the Turk Street flat, I used to prepare a lamb broth for Swamiji every day. I would cook it very slowly for three or four hours, and it was very nourishing because every bit of food value would be cooked out of the meat. One day for some reason I had not been able to get the broth made by the time the class was to start at ten-thirty. Swamiji looked into the kitchen before going to the class. “Aren’t you going to the class?” he asked. I told him that because I had neglected to plan my work properly, now I had to stay in the kitchen and miss the class. “Well, that’s all right,” he said. “I will meditate for

*Cliff House, San Francisco, c. 1900*





you.” All through the class I felt that he really was meditating for me. And do you know, I have always had the feeling that he still does meditate for me.’

‘Did Swamiji ever rest during the daytime while he was in the Turk Street flat?’ Swami Ashokananda asked.

‘Yes, when he did not have a lecture or some engagement in the afternoon he took a nap after lunch every day. He would sleep for about two hours.’

Swami Ashokananda’s eyes twinkled. ‘And did he ever snore?’ he asked.

‘No,’ Mrs Hansbrough answered with amusement, ‘I never heard him snore.’

‘Now, when was it that Swamiji went to Camp Taylor?’

‘It was about the first of May 1900. The lectures and classes closed in San Francisco on April 14, but on April 11 Swamiji moved to the Home of Truth in Alameda. It was Mrs Aspinall who suggested his going to Camp Taylor. She and Mr Aspinall had already arranged to go there, and one Sunday evening [April 22] when we were all sitting in the Home of Truth, she was conjecturing where each of us would be a week hence: Swamiji in Chicago (I had already bought his ticket for him), I in Los Angeles, and they at Camp Taylor. Then, turning to Swamiji, she said, “You had better change your mind and go with us.” And Swamiji replied, “Very well. And madam (indicating me) will go with us.”

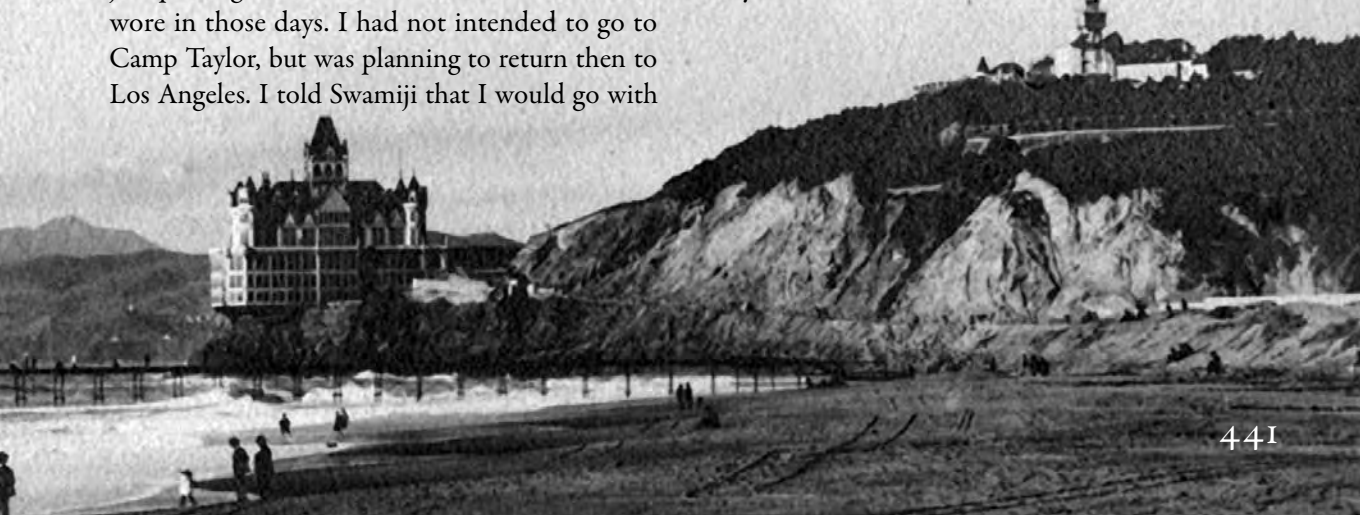
‘We set out the next morning. When I went to his room, Swamiji had on the English hunting suit which someone had given him in the East. He was just putting on the detachable cuffs, which men wore in those days. I had not intended to go to Camp Taylor, but was planning to return then to Los Angeles. I told Swamiji that I would go with

him on the ferry to Sausalito and say goodbye to him there.

‘He took off his cuffs and dropped them in the bureau drawer. “Then,” he said, “I go to Chicago.” Of course I at once said that I would certainly go to Camp Taylor, and we started off shortly afterward.

‘In the party were Mr and Mrs Aspinall, Mr and Mrs Roorbach, Miss Ansell and Miss Bell besides Swamiji and myself. I had packed Swamiji’s things in two big wicker hampers, and Mr Roorbach undertook to handle them for Swamiji. When we got to the ferry, Mr Roorbach walked on ahead with his bulky load. As I mentioned before, he and all the others in the Home of Truth were vegetarians; and as Swamiji saw him struggling with the big baskets he said, “Boiled potatoes and asparagus can’t stand up under that.”

‘In San Francisco we took another ferry to Sausalito, where we were to get the train for Camp Taylor. But the brief discussion I had had with Swamiji about leaving him at Sausalito had been just enough to make us miss the ferry that would have connected comfortably with the Camp Taylor train. The result was that we arrived just in time to see the train pull out. Mr Roorbach said there was a narrow-gauge train that also went there, and we found that that was just ready to leave. We hurried to the proper platform. This train was just getting under way. I called to the conductor on the back platform, who called back, “If you’ll run, I’ll wait for you.” I looked at Swamiji. He simply said, “I will not run.” Even though the train was there within a few yards of him, he would not hurry to catch it.





*Kitchen at  
Camp Tay-  
lor, August  
1900: seat-  
ed, Mrs R N  
Miller; stand-  
ing at the  
stove, Eloise  
Roorbach*

‘So I went [to Camp Taylor]—and we stayed two weeks. On May 2 when we got on the train at Sausalito, we were soon travelling through wooded country, along the bank of the stream, and in the peaceful atmosphere Swamiji began to relax almost at once. He was sitting next to the window so that he could look out, and he began

‘Well, there were no more trains that day, so we had to go all the way back to the Home of Truth in Alameda. On the way back I remarked that we had missed the train because there was no engine hitched to our cars. Swamiji turned to me and said: ‘We couldn’t go because your heart was in Los Angeles. There is no engine that can pull against a heart—there is no force in the world which can pull against a heart. Put your heart into your work and nothing can stop you.’ It was a tremendously significant statement, and it has been vivid in my memory all these years.

‘The Aspinalls had gone on ahead of us to Camp Taylor, and I had discovered when we missed the train that my baggage was missing. Later I found they had taken it up with them. After all the missed trains and the loss of time, I had once more decided to go back to Los Angeles, but the next day I had to go up to Camp Taylor to recover my luggage. Mrs Aspinall tried to make me promise that I would not go to say goodbye to Swamiji when I got back to the city: she said I would surely prevent him from getting there [to camp] a second time. When I had told Swamiji I would have to go up [to the camp] for my baggage, he remarked, ‘Strange, Mother’s dragging you up there, when you tried your best not to go.’ And when I returned with the baggage, he said, ‘Well, come up there for a week and we won’t stay longer.’ (When I finally had departed for the south [several weeks later], he told someone, ‘She had to go back because the babe (Dorothy) wanted her.’)

to sing softly to himself. ‘Here in the country I’m beginning to feel like myself,’ he said. That first night Swamiji built a fire on a spit of sand that ran out into the stream. We all sat around the fire in the quiet night and Swamiji sang for us and told stories, such as those about Shukadeva and Vyasa. This was to be our custom on most nights. We would often cook chapatis, too, in pans over the coals.’

‘How was Swamiji’s voice?’ Swami Ashokananda inquired. ‘Was it a powerful voice?’

‘No, it was not a powerful voice, but it had great depth. The manager of Washington Hall in San Francisco once told me he had never heard so sweet a voice.’

‘What was the usual routine of Swamiji’s day at Camp Taylor?’

‘We would usually have breakfast sometime between seven-thirty and eight. Then about ten or ten-thirty Swamiji would hold a meditation, which took place in Miss Bell’s tent, as she had requested it. We were located about a mile upstream from the old hotel, in a quiet, windless spot on the east side of the stream called Juhl Camp. The railroad ran by on the opposite bank. Mr Juhl was an admirer of Miss Bell and had arranged the location for us. We had five tents: one for Swamiji and one each for Mrs Aspinall, Miss Bell, Miss Ansell, and Mrs Roorbach. I slept outside Mrs Aspinall’s tent until the rain drove me inside. She had some printed mottoes such as the Home of Truth people often put up, and she had pinned some of these to the sloping roof of the tent. Of course, wherever the



pins were, the tent leaked; and one night I found the water dripping steadily on my forehead from "Love never faileth"! There was a delightful pool in the stream for bathing, which all of us used except Swamiji, who found the water too cold. Water for cooking and washing was piped to the camp, and we did our cooking outside. Swamiji really enjoyed his stay at Camp Taylor.

'After two weeks there, Swamiji returned to San Francisco [in mid-May] and was the guest of Dr Logan for a time. I stayed with a brother-in-law of mine, Jack Hansbrough, for about three days and then went back to Los Angeles. After I had left, Swamiji took another brief vacation trip somewhere outside of San Francisco with a Dr Miller [Hiller?] before he left for the Eastern States.

'In addition to Swamiji's one-night visit to Dr Miller's home in San Francisco, another doctor took him after he had been to Camp Taylor, to another resort outside of San Francisco for a rest.

'I saw him every day before I left, and twice the last day. Then he was ill in bed. I stood at the foot of the bed and said good-bye to him. "Come and shake hands," he said. "I never make a fuss over people even when I have known them many years." I assured him that I had certainly not expected him to make any fuss over me. "The Lord bless you and keep you," he said, and I departed. Later I discovered that I had left a handbag there. But after all the false starts for Camp Taylor I was not going back for that, so I asked Mrs Aspinall to get it when she had an opportunity and send it on to me. She told me later that when she went for it, Swamiji remarked:

"So she left that, did she? Take it out of here!"

'I did not hear from him until he reached Chicago and New York.'

### June 22, 1941

Driving home from the Sunday lecture at the Century Club.

'Swamiji had marvellous patience with all of us,'

Mrs Hansbrough declared. 'He made a great effort to do something for us. He took away any feeling on our part that he was superior to us.

'He paid a good deal of attention to children when he met them privately,' she continued. 'There was an old stable in the vacant lot next to our home in Los Angeles, where Swamiji used to sit with the children and look at their picture books. He particularly enjoyed *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*. He said they were absolutely typical in their portrayal of the processes of the human mind. He said that Lewis Carroll had some kind of



Swami Vivekananda at Mr Charles Neilson's house, Alameda, in the spring of 1900

intuition, that his was not an ordinary mind, to have written these books.'

Later Mrs Hansbrough spoke of an episode, also in their home in Los Angeles, involving a woman portrait painter, who was determined to do a portrait of Swamiji. She had approached him several times after meetings, but Swamiji had always declined.

'One day the woman came to our home,' Mrs Hansbrough said, 'and asked me if I would help her by letting her sketch him unawares. Somehow Swamiji sensed her presence and called me. "You get that woman out of here or I'll leave!" he told me. Needless to say, I saw her to the door.'

# Kanchipuram, the Four-fold Glory: Shiva Kanchi

Dr Prema Nandakumar

(Continued from the previous issue)

**W**E call the area Shiva Kanchi, of course. But Goddess Kamakshi takes precedence in Kanchipuram! The temple is spread over an area of about five acres; the gleaming golden vimana of her temple attracts one's attention immediately. Historians say that separate shrines for the goddess who was worshipped as the consort of Ekambareshwara were built only from the twelfth century onwards. The temple of Kamakshi, also known as Kamakottam, obviously began as a Shakta centre (for worship of the Mother Goddess). Archaeological studies however claim a much earlier origin to the temple as one for a Jain Yakshi, when the holy place was known as Vimala Tirupalli.

The importance of Kamakshi for Shiva Kanchi may be traced to the Puranic narrative which says that she was originally worshipped as the consort of Ekambareshwara, being part of him in the Ardhanarishwara form.<sup>1</sup> According to the *Kanchi*

*Kama-kodi, protecting Ekambareshwara from the flood*

*Purana*, Parvati once covered the eyes of Shiva in Kailasa, thus plunging creation into darkness, and consequently inviting a curse. She expiated her guilt by taking human birth and undertaking tapas, worshipping a linga made of sand. When the nearby river was in flood, she embraced the linga to guard it against the rising waters. Hence she is *kama-kodi*, the loving creeper that has entwined herself round the Lord. In the course of evolution of her worship, the goddess began to be worshipped as the Durga of Kamakottam (the old temple), and later the present temple of Kamakshi was raised on what was apparently a Jain temple dedicated to a Yakshi.

The glorious city of Kanchi was put to the sword by the Islamic general Malik Kafur in the fourteenth century. Idols were broken down. The Kamakshi temple was one of the major victims. As in other Kanchi temples, worship was stopped in the Kamakshi temple too for several decades, till Kumara Kampana of Vijayanagar drove out the Muslim invaders and restored religious ritual. From then on, the Vijayanagar kings took good care of Kanchi, and emperor Krishnadeva Raya loved visiting this great city.

The Kamakshi temple today is at the very centre of the city, with the Ekambaranatha temple to the north-west and the Varadaraja temple to the south-east. It is interesting to note that all the major temples in the city are structured to face the prominent temple of Kamakshi with its four spires. The seated Kamakshi is a noble image, and to her front is the Sri Chakra in which the Mother Goddess is said to reside in her subtle form.





This city is rich in legends. We are told that originally Kamakshi was the fierce form of the Supreme Goddess—*ugrasvarupini*.

It was Adi Shankara who installed the Sri Chakra, which contained the ferocity of the goddess and transformed her into the calm and beautiful *brahmasvarupini*.

Kamakshi's residence in her *brahma-shakti* form is in a cave below. She is said to have appeared on earth once to destroy demons, including the notorious Bhandasura. The Tapas Kamakshi (goddess undergoing tapas to expiate the sin of having closed the Lord's eyes) has also been placed in the sanctum. Coming out of this garbhagriha, we see on the left Kamakshi's attendant Varahi. To her front is the *santana stambha* indicating the place where King Dasharatha gained the boon of progeny from Goddess Kamakshi. In the first *prakara* (circumambulatory path) we have the niche of Dharma Sastha (Ayyappan) with his consorts Purna and Pushkala. Tradition avers that Karikala Chola worshipped this Sastha, who gave him the deadly weapon called Chendu which ensured his victory in the Himalayan regions. Though it is mistakenly indicated in the niche that Sastha gave a bouquet of flowers (*poo-chendu*) to Karikala Chola, the fact that Sastha is represented with the typical Chendu weapon in his hands provides the right pointer.

One can never exhaust Shiva Kanchi. There are innumerable temples dedicated to Shiva here, and one can wander into any one of them and remain absorbed in the visuals as well as the devotional fervour evoked by aspirants going there for worship. Since Kamakshi reigns supreme in Kanchi, none of the Shiva temples have a separate shrine for the goddess, though an image is kept for ceremonial (*utsava*) processions. Many of the temples are thought to be several hundred years old. For instance, if we go out through the western gate of the Kamakshi temple, we can walk to the Makalishwara temple, said to be the special residence of Rahu and Ketu.



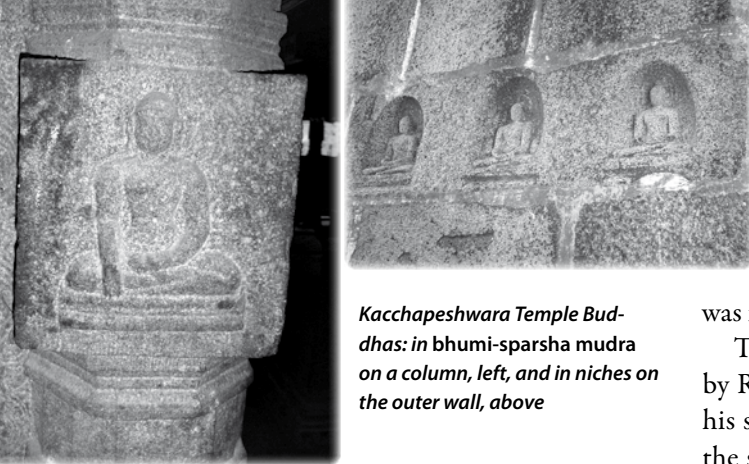
*Kacchapeshwara Temple: Nandi Mandapam, right, and detail (with the ecumenical presence of Garuda, Hanuman, and Nandi), above*



A snake called Makala attained mukti by worshipping Shiva in this area, and hence prayers are offered at the foot of the twin trees of neem and pipal, where a Naga has been consecrated.

Going out of the southern gate of the Kamakshi temple, we come to the celebrated Kacchapeshwara temple. As the presiding deity is mentioned in the seventh century classic *Dandi Alankara*, the temple is very old. Legend speaks of Mahavishnu in his tortoise form worshipping Shiva at this place. Apart from the sanctity of the temple, what strikes one most is a series of Buddhist figures on the stone pillars of an inner mandapa. It is obvious that these pillars have been taken from a Buddhist vihara. Perhaps the vihara was the original structure and when it came down to make way for a Shiva temple several centuries ago, some of the masonry was reused by the builders.

There are other Shiva temples like Suragar-  
esha, Siddhishwara, Manikandeshwara, and Ra-  
manatheshwara. The one to Lakulishwara (Dha-  
valeshwara) is associated with yogis and siddhas. It is quite obvious that from the seventh century onwards, when the Nayanmars went round singing their mellifluous songs on Shiva, there was a tremendous spurt in temple-building activity. Though the corpus of devotional hymnology per-



*Kacchapeswara Temple Buddhas: in bhumi-sparsha mudra on a column, left, and in niches on the outer wall, above*

taining to Shiva Kanchi is vast, only five temples have been hailed by the Nayanmars in their hymns. They are Ekambareshwara, Tirumetralli, Onakanthanthali, Anekathankavatam, and Kachinerikkarakadu. Thus Tirunavukkarasar worshipped Ekambareshwara and the goddess Elavarkuzhali with an exquisite decad:

He is the God of Dissolution; He is the King who smote Death;  
 He is earth; He became water of the earth; He is wind;  
 He is fire; He is rumbling thunder and lightning;  
 His is the glorious, coral-like ruddy body be-daubed  
 With white ash; on His crest floats the crescent;  
 on His long  
 Matted hair He sports the Ganga of abundant water;  
 He is Yekampan of Kacchi girt with beauteous groves;  
 Behold Him, the one enshrined in my thought!<sup>2</sup>

Of the two major Shiva temples, Ekamabaranatha's raja-gopuram, built by Krishnadeva Raya in the sixteenth century, rises to 192 feet. Originally planned and structured by the Pallava kings of Kanchi on a spread of twenty acres, this temple was further embellished by the Cholas and the kings of Vijayanagar. The deity here represents the element earth (*prithvi*). The consecrated tree is mango, and the guide assures me it is 3,500 years old. Why should I disbelieve him? For time stands still in these precincts, though there is a lot of renovation work going on. The famous shrine of Vikatachakra Vinayaka is in the Thousand Pillar Hall, and the pillars stand witness to the mastery of sculp-

ture by the workmen of earlier centuries. Another important landmark is the temple to Subramania known as Kumarakottam, which has been made famous by Kachiappa Shivachariar—whose epic Kanda Puranam was first recited in the mandapam of this temple.

The celebrated Kailasanatha temple was built by Rajasimha (Narasimhavarman Pallava II) and his son Mahendra III. If it is exciting to go into the smaller Shiva temples in Kanchi and wander around watching the sculptures and searching for Jain or Buddhist remains of an earlier era, or to keep gazing at the Buddhist figures in meditation on the higher reaches of an outer wall of a temple, it is an experience of a lifetime to enter the Kailasanatha temple at the periphery of the city. The sanctum has a huge linga, symbolizing the Supreme, while on the rear wall one can watch wide-eyed the sumptuous Somaskanda panel. Shiva and Parvati have Subramania between them (on the lap of his mother), with Brahma and Vishnu watching the group in adoration. The outer wall of the sanctum is an amazing panorama of gods and goddesses. In between the two walls we have a very narrow passage for *parikrama*. One has to crawl to enter it and also to come out of it. A few of us who had come to worship were invited by the officiating priest to go in with the tempting words: 'This is the entry into heaven, the Swarga Vasal, and if you do the *pradakshina*, it is like having another birth, along with Shiva's grace.' Only one person was ready to do it, and he did it with amazing ease, though till he came out of the cave-like opening, we were standing frozen with worry!

The temple, built in sandstone with nearly sixty planned niches, seems to be the work of gods. The intricate carvings of divine beings, a never-ending repeat of the Somaskanada panel, the mythic lions and the imposing Nandis have to be seen and experienced. Here is Vishnu holding up the Mandara mountain as gods and demons churn the ocean, a little away there is the confrontation between Shiva and Arjuna. Soon comes Shiva destroying Yama, and again dancing with a *damaru* in his hand in gay



abandon. Nay, there is much more.

'The cells of many of these contain traces of old paintings on plain walls or painted stucco over reliefs. The external reliefs of these *parivara* [family] shrines of the *malika* [cloister gallery] contain a variety of sculptures, both Saivite and Vaisnavite, of varied iconography, thus making this temple complex a veritable museum of iconography and plastic art. The sculptures include the *dikpalas* [the guardian deities of the directions] and Ganesa, who makes his first appearance in Pallava temples, as also the Saptamatrika group, Chandesa and other *parivara* deities.'<sup>3</sup>

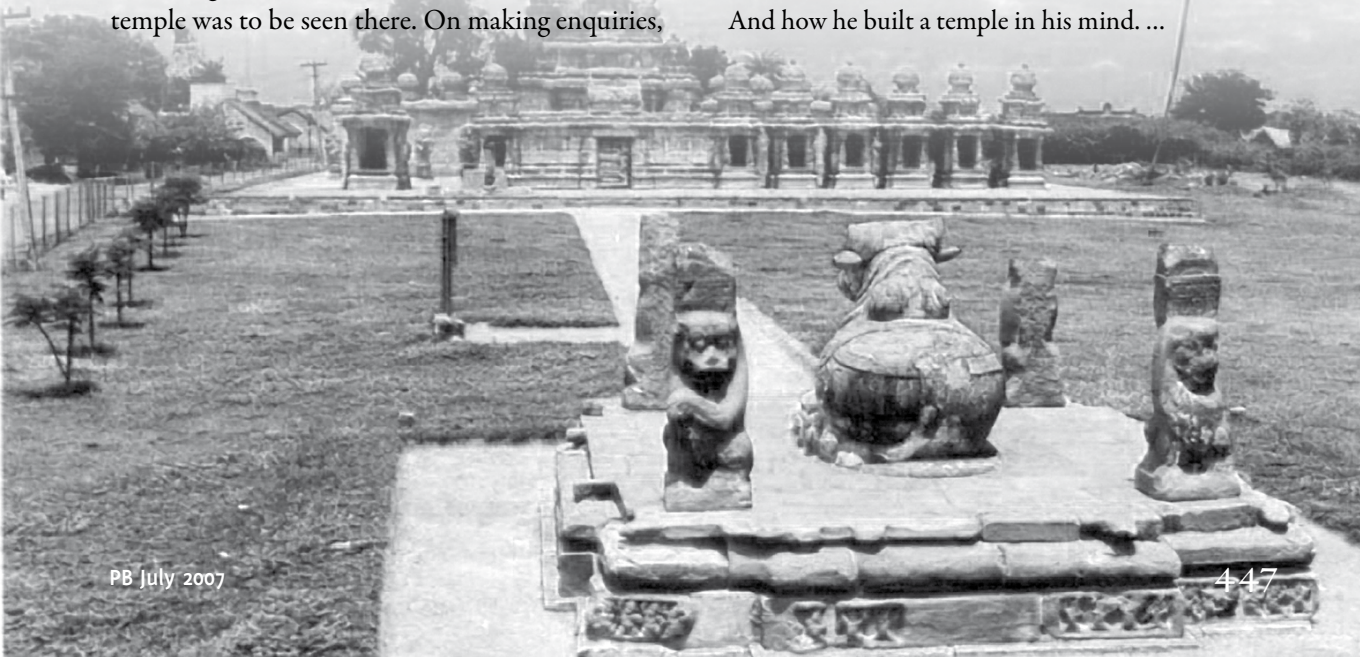
There is a charming legend connecting the construction of this temple with Pusalar, a Nayanar whose history is recounted by Sekkilar. When the Pallava king Rajasimha had completed the splendid temple to Kailasanatha, an auspicious date for the consecration of the temple was chosen by his chief priest. However, the deity appeared in Rajasimha's dream and said that the date of consecration would have to be changed as the Lord was to be present in the magnificent temple being consecrated by Pusalar in Thiruninravur (Tinnanur) at the same time. The king was mystified; how could a huge temple be built in his own kingdom without his knowledge? So he hastened to Tiruninravur. No temple was to be seen there. On making enquiries,

he learnt that one poor brahmin, Pusalar, had been going around saying he was building a temple to Shiva and would daily announce the progress in the works. The king went to Pusalar and spoke to him of his dream. The poor devotee exclaimed: 'Alas! I have built only in my imagination. Did the Lord really take notice of my desire?' The king saluted the devotee with reverence and returned to his capital. Pusalar's sincerity became legendary, and he is honoured as the Nayanar of whom Sekkilar sings in his *Periya Purana*:

Let us recollect Tiruninravur's Pusalar  
Who wished to build a temple to Shiva  
But had not the wherewithal.  
And how he built a temple in his mind. ...



*Kailasanatha Temple: Shiva and Parvati, above,  
and Nandi on guard, below*







*Sculptural treasures of Kailasanatha temple: from left, Kirita and Arjuna; Mahishasuramardini; descent of Ganga*

Having decided, he tried for money.  
 'How shall I build without capital?'  
 He began collecting every thing needed  
 To build, all in his imagination.  
 He got materials and carpenters,  
 Decided upon a date to lay the foundation,  
 Planned everything according to the Agamas  
 And built without sleeping even at night. ...  
 He (the King) came to the place and asked  
 Those present: 'Where is Pusalar's temple?'  
 'Pusalar has built none', they replied.  
 'Let all scholars come', the king said. ...  
 After consecrating Shiva in the mind-temple  
 At the auspicious time, and having performed  
 Worship for a long time after,  
 The devotee reached the feet of Shiva.<sup>4</sup>

The legend indicates the richness of the temple-building activity of the times as well as the widespread dissemination of Sanskrit Puranas that led to the inextricable association of temples with the great Indian tradition.

For Shiva Kanchi, the Kanchi Kamakoti Math is a major Shaivite presence. Tradition avers that Adi Shankara went to the Himalayas and had the darshan of Shiva and Parvati. He brought the *sphatika* (crystal) linga given to him by Shiva to Kanchi where he established a monastery and installed the linga for regular worship. Among the pontiffs who graced the math in recent times, Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, popularly known as the Paramacharya, took the math to great heights by initiating a resur-

gence of Indian culture. Vedic studies, renovation of temples, and traditional arts like sculpture and architecture have been given a great fillip. The math also provides medical help to the masses.

The Jnanaprakasara Math has done priceless service to Shiva Kanchi by propagating the Shaiva Siddhanta, probably the oldest tradition of its kind. Apart from ritualistic worship of the Meykandeswara Linga, the math arranges lectures on philosophical and theological aspects of Shaivism, as propounded in the fourteen Meykanda Shastras. Well, who can exhaust Shiva Kanchi? One must go there again and again and again. And experience the calm of mind made passionless by the blue-throated Lord:

Like the faultless lute, the moon at night,  
 The southern breeze, the brilliant spring,  
 The scented lake covered by humming bees,  
 Is the cool shade of my Lord Shiva's feet.<sup>5</sup>

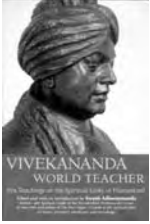
*(To be concluded)*

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1. For further information on the subject see R Venkataraman, *Devi Kamakshi in Kanchi* (Srirangam: Vani Vilas, 1973).
2. Translated by T N Ramachandran.
3. K R Srinivasan, *Temples of South India* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1991), 116.
4. *Periya Purana*, 65.1, 5, 6, 12, 17.
5. *Tirunavukkarasar Tevaram*, 90.1.

# REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications.



## **Vivekananda, World Teacher: His Teachings on the Spiritual Unity of Humankind**

Ed. Swami Adiswarananda

SkyLight Paths Publishing, Sunset Farm  
Offices, Route 4, PO Box 237, Wood-  
stock, Vermont 05091. [www.skylightpaths.com](http://www.skylightpaths.com). 2006. xviii + 248 pp. \$21.99.

This is a welcome compendium of writings about and by Swami Vivekananda which will acquaint the reader (especially one who hails from the West or is steeped in Western culture) with the essence of the life-message and many-sided personality of the great teacher. The well-written introduction by the editor succinctly brings out the relevance of Vivekananda's message of oneness in today's crisis-ridden world and the specialty of the 'spiritual humanism' preached by him. An article by Swami Nikhilananda follows, entitled 'Swami Vivekananda: India and America', which was first published in 1963 on the occasion of Vivekananda's birth centenary. In it the erudite author traces the evolution of American culture prior to Vivekananda's visit, the context of his sojourn to America, his appreciation of the positive aspects of American character and society, his perception of the national needs of India and America and the complementary roles the two countries can play for each other's benefit, and the relevance of Vivekananda's American visit for the future development of the two countries. The main body of the book, divided into three parts, consists of selections—full texts and excerpts—from the works of Swami Vivekananda. The parts are headed 'The Ideal of a Universal Religion', 'Worship of the Living God', and 'Great Spiritual Teachers of the World'. The first two parts give the reader a fair acquaintance with two important aspects of Vivekananda's teachings which are of vital importance to the modern world, riven and afflicted as it is by intolerance, fanaticism, selfishness, and the cult of consumerism. The third part links the values upheld by Vivekananda with the teachings of the

great religious leaders of the world and establishes their abiding relevance in the present-day world. A fourth part, entitled 'Intimate Glimpses of Vivekananda', contains reports of contemporary journalists, appreciations by some great thinkers, reminiscences of a number of disciples and friends, a few excerpts from Vivekananda's letters, and four enchanting poetic compositions by him. The book ends with a chronology of the principal events of Vivekananda's life.

The book will give every serious reader a fair idea of the greatness of Vivekananda and inspire him or her to know more about him. There is one gap, however, which if filled in, would make the book more interesting to the modern reader. The impact of Vivekananda on America and India as recounted by Swami Nikhilananda covers the period up to the early 1960s. The crisis of values that has engulfed the Western world, and especially America, in the second half of the twentieth century is well known. It is described, for instance, by the historian Eric Hobsbawm in his *Age of Extremes*, Chapter 11. It is also referred to by Swami Ranganathananda, the thirteenth President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, at several places in his *Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gita* (for instance, on pp. 329–30 of vol I); at the same time, Ranganathananda shows how receptive Western people are to the values preached by Swami Vivekananda. The crisis of values in the Western world, as well as in many developing countries, has become even more acute after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the failure of the ideal which it stood for. At this critical time the message of Swami Vivekananda is all the more relevant, and indeed it seems that there is a revival of interest in him in many parts of the world. It would thus be appropriate if the account of the impact and relevance of Vivekananda were brought up to date, possibly as a supplement to Swami Nikhilananda's article.

*Prof. Shoutir Kishore Chatterjee*  
Former Professor of Statistics  
Calcutta University, Kolkata



## Humanism of Swami Vivekananda

Lekshmi R

Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, Thycaud, Thiruvananthapuram. 2005. xii + 212 pp. Rs 60.

The advent of Sri Ramakrishna in the nineteenth century brought in its wake a galaxy of dedicated disciples who spread his message of universal love and service of God in human beings. This message has since been widely broadcast in India and abroad. The life of Sri Ramakrishna was an open book for all those who hankered for eternal truths. Swami Vivekananda, Sri Ramakrishna's arch-disciple, interpreted his life and teachings and was the harbinger of the neo-Vedanta movement that has had a significant impact on global thought.

The book under review is the outcome of an academic study of the Vedanta philosophy that Swami Vivekananda lived and preached. The author mentions in the preface that this is a modified version of her doctoral thesis. The book presents the kernel of the thesis shorn of all academic formalism. This is as it should be for the lay reader.

The text spans six chapters. The introductory chapter deals with humanism in general and its historical characteristics as seen in the West, in China, and in India. The author points out that humanism in the West had its origin in the European Renaissance (fourteenth century onwards). Philosophers like Mill, Dewey, Feuerbach, Kant, and Hegel contributed to the development of humanism in the West. The contributions of Jaspers, Sartre, Heidegger, and Camus have also been briefly noted as also the humanistic thinking in the Chinese and Indian traditions.

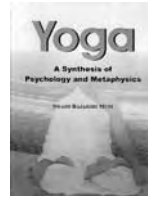
In the subsequent chapters, the author traces the metaphysical basis of Swami Vivekananda's humanism, his vision of the human being, and the social and political dimensions of his thought. She correlates the Indian renaissance with the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement. She also dwells on Swami Vivekananda's vision of human excellence and the ideal of service—service to humanity as worship of God. In the penultimate chapter she correlates the philosophies of Aurobindo, Tagore, Narayana Guru, Gandhi, Nehru, and M N Roy. All of these shed ample light on Swami Vivekananda's humanism and help place it in proper perspective.

In his foreword, Swami Gautamananda of Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, has pointed out that the author's endeavours are in line with research done by earlier scholars who have published detailed and authentic studies on Swami Vivekananda.

Nicely produced and reasonably priced, the book would be a good addition to personal and public libraries.

Dr N B Patil

Honorary Professor of Sanskrit  
Ananthacharya Indological Research Institute  
Colaba, Mumbai



## Yoga: A Synthesis of Psychology and Metaphysics

Swami Rajarshi Muni

Motilal Banarsidass, 41 U A Bungalow Road, Delhi. E-mail: [mlbd@vsnl.com](mailto:mlbd@vsnl.com). 2006. xx + 184 pp. Rs 250.

Since the revival of yogic practices during the last century, a large number of books on yoga have been regularly coming to the market. Some of them are translations of Patanjali's yoga sutras or commentaries on them. Some others are interpretations of yogic practices for daily life. There are also a few books which treat yoga as a system of philosophy or metaphysics. The book under review belongs to this last category.

Raja Yoga is rightly called the Indian system of psychology, since it deals with the analysis of mental states *in extenso*. It is also looked upon as a philosophical system leading to liberation from human misery. It has its own philosophical foundations in Kapila's Sankhya and is considered one of the six schools of Indian philosophy.

The author of this book was born in 1931. He earned his bachelor's degree from Bombay University and his master's degree in sociology from Poona University. Between 1954 and 1970, he served in the government of India, and in 1971 renounced the mundane world, receiving the name Rajarshi Muni. His yogic practices started as early as 1951, when he was still in college. This background accounts for some of the important features of the book.

The book contains fourteen chapters and appendices. The chapters cover a wide range of topics: from the origin and history of yoga philosophy, through the concept of rebirth, to the study of superconsciousness. The practical aspects are relegated to the two appendices, which seems strange in a book on

yoga. The author has obviously concentrated more on the theoretical and philosophical aspects of the subject in the main text.

The book gives a very comprehensive overview of all important aspects of yoga in its interplay with psychology and philosophy. Nothing important is left out. The author has striven to place yoga and yogic practices in their proper perspective within the larger context of philosophy and has succeeded admirably in this attempt. There is a discussion of the Sankhya doctrine, the three *gunas*, the concept of consciousness based on the *avastha-traya* (three states) analysis of the *Mandukya Upanishad*, the cause of bondage and suffering, and such other issues. All these are linked to the purpose of human existence and the experience of bliss.

The analysis is cogent, and easy enough to be grasped by beginners. But a prior acquaintance with the basics of Indian philosophy will make the book easier to understand. The treatment of the practical aspects in the appendices is rather cursory and may require referral to other books that are devoted exclusively to practice.

It is a fruitful exercise to go through the book and get a comprehensive idea of yoga in all its aspects. The book will also serve as a useful reference for students who already know how to practise yoga, without knowing why.

Dr N V C Swamy

Dean of Academic Programmes

Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana  
Bangalore



### ***In Quest of Self***

Prabhakar Ananthaswamy

'Gurukrupa', B 8, Shankarapark, Basavangudi, Bangalore 560 004. E-mail: [spurthy@vsnl.com](mailto:spurthy@vsnl.com). 2005. xii + 201 pp. Rs 180.

**T**he stressful life in urban areas prompts many to seek the ancient wisdom of seers and saints. In this context, the experiences of contemporary seekers who have attempted the journey to the Self is bound to be rewarding. *In Quest of Self*, says the author, is intended 'to lead the reader from his present state of awareness to that unlimited absolute state' by sharing the wisdom gained through a 'seekers journey'.

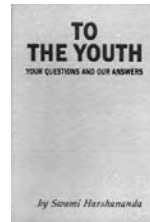
Analysing the hectic lifestyle in today's competitive milieu, the author highlights the feverish search for wealth, which leads to attachment, anx-

ieties, exploitation, mistrust, and insecurity; and the malady is further compounded by the Internet revolution. Helpless and miserable, one turns to a different path, and it is in this turning that the spiritual journey begins. Instead of spending life merely acquiring wealth and raising a family, our aim as humans should be to realize our divinity—always seeing, hearing, and thinking of the divine. The mind has to be reconditioned for this transformation to be successful. A karma yogi, for instance, does not identify with actions but enjoys work for its own sake. With this attitude, total quality management (TQM) is achieved effortlessly. Vedanta provides an ideal platform for youth to lead a purposeful life. A Vedantin does not shun the world but develops the right attitude towards it and right ways to utilize worldly things. But if Vedantic precepts are not practised while one is young, then success may remain a forlorn hope. The role of the guru has been discussed at length. The guru has a significant presence in one's spiritual life, not as a problem-solver but as one leading the seeker 'to that state which needs no solution'.

In his foreword, Justice B N Srikrishna rightly observes that the author, a young communications engineer, has brought together spiritual wisdom that will serve as a good primer of Vedanta. The language is simple. As the book attempts to codify a veritable jigsaw of spiritual experiences, the readers will find that 'some thoughts find an echo repeatedly'. And they will be none the worse for it.

P S Sundaram

Mumbai



### ***To the Youth: Your Questions and Our Answers***

Swami Harshananda

Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004. E-mail: [srkmath@vsnl.com](mailto:srkmath@vsnl.com). 2006. iii + 68 pp. Rs 12.

**T**his booklet comprises questions asked by young participants at a youth convention in Bangalore, and the answers to those questions given by Swami Harshananda. Since these are 'real-world' questions with clear, practical answers, the booklet should appeal to thinking young people. This is the first edition printed from Chennai; the booklet has seen five previous editions printed from Bangalore.

PB



# REPORTS



## News from Belur Math

Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated a two-storeyed extension to the charitable dispensary at Belur Math on 5 August 2007. The dispensary was begun on a small scale in 1913, with free allopathic and homeopathic sections, and started functioning in its own building in 1938. At present, the allopathic section has departments in general and dental medicine, ophthalmology, ENT, dermatology, gynaecology, radiology, pathology, and biochemistry. More than 700,000 cases are treated every year.

## New Math Centre

A branch of the Ramakrishna Math has been started at Bagda, Purulia, on a 6.8-acre plot of land which had been donated to Swami Brahmananda, the first president of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, in 1920. **Ramakrishna Math, Bagda**, can be contacted through **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Purulia**.

## Universal Temple, Chicago

The Sri Ramakrishna Universal Temple being built by the **Vivekananda Vedanta Society, Chicago**, was consecrated on 1 July in an elaborate ceremony. The temple currently includes a shrine and chapel, monastic residence, bookstore and offices, kitchen and dining hall, and parking lot. Future plans include a large dome for the temple and a larger dining hall.

## Vivekananda University Completes 2 Years

**Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur**, celebrated the second anniversary of its founding on 4 July at its Narendrapur faculty centre. Prof. Moolchand Sharma, Vice Chairperson, Uni-

*Sri Ramakrishna Universal Temple, Homer Glen (a suburb of Chicago); inset, consecration homa*

versity Grants Commission, New Delhi, was the chief guest. Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the university's website, [www.rkmvu.ac.in](http://www.rkmvu.ac.in), and Swami Prabhanandaji, general secretary of the twin organizations, presided over the function.

## Ramakrishna Vijayam Tops One Lakh

*Ramakrishna Vijayam*, the Tamil-language monthly of the Ramakrishna Order published from **Ramakrishna Math, Chennai**, since 1921, has crossed one-hundred-thousand copies per month circulation. On 22 July, the math held a function on the vast ground adjacent to Vivekanandar Illam to commemorate this achievement. Nearly 10,000 students, devotees,



*Special issue of Ramakrishna Vijayam celebrating 100,000 subscribers*

and supporters participated in the function, and many distinguished personalities of Tamil Nadu addressed the gathering. Three volumes containing select articles compiled from previous issues of the magazine were released.

## News from Branch Centres

**Ramakrishna Math, Puri**, conducted a medical camp from 19 to 24 July on the sacred occasion of Ratha Yatra, at which 2,228 persons were treated. The ashrama also served sherbet to 20,000 pilgrims.

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj inaugurated the newly built higher secondary block of the





*Bihar flood relief: delivering supplies, awaiting relief, flooded road (from left)*

school at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Kati-har**, on 4 August, and presided over a public function held on the occasion.

On 25 August, Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, unveiled a fibreglass statue of Sri Sarada Devi installed by **Ramakrishna Math, Baghbazar**, at the nearby *Mayer Ghat*, in place of the old relief which had been installed by the math earlier. He also presided over the meeting held on this occasion, in which Justice Sri Shyamal Sen, former Chairman of Human Rights Commission, West Bengal, and some other dignitaries spoke.

**Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot**, conducted a summer camp from 7 to 31 May for children 7–13 years old, in which 105 children took part. The programme included yoga exercises, chanting, bhajans, moral lessons, and crafts.

Sri S K Singh, Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, inaugurated the newly constructed buildings for a students' dormitory and 10-bed hospital for hostel students at **Ramakrishna Mission, Aalo** (formerly Along) on 1 July.

## **Flood Relief**

Recent devastating floods in several parts of Assam, Bihar, Karnataka, West Bengal, and Bangladesh called forth immediate relief efforts in affected areas by centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot**, continued its relief operations among flood-affected people in Gujarat. Details of relief materials distributed during August 2007 are given below.

*Assam · Guwahati:* 45 litres phenol, 100 kg bleaching powder, 90,000 halogen tablets, and 200 mosquito nets to 675 families of 19 villages in Kamrup district; and medical treatment to 1,050 per-

sons. **Narottam Nagar:** 200 umbrellas and 200 mosquito nets to 200 families of Moolang Gaon, Lido, Tinsukia.

*Bihar · Chapra:* 870 kg rice to 87 flood-affected families of Mushahar Toli (Lalbazar), Maharajanjan block, Chapra district. **Patna:** Cooked food to 4,000 persons for ten days, and 47,500 kg chira, 9,500 kg gur, 19,000 candles, 19,000 matchboxes, and 950,000 halogen tablets to 9,500 families belonging to 186 villages of 6 blocks in Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur, and Samastipur districts. **Muzaffarpur:** 23,000 kg chira, 2,626 kg gur, 11,280 candles, 2,480 matchboxes, and 224,800 halogen tablets to 6,977 families belonging to 41 villages of Aurai, Kanti, Katra, Gayaghat, Minapur, and Moshahari blocks of Muzaffarpur district.

*Gujarat · Rajkot:* 20,418 food packets, 1,048 family kits (containing 3 kg khichri, 5 kg wheat flour, 1 kg sugar, 200 gm tea powder, 300 gm spices, and 1 matchbox), 900 kg vegetables, 1,000 kg edible oil, 125 steel utensil sets (containing a glass, a plate, a spoon and two bowls), 125 chadars, and 1,000 tarpaulins to 25,658 persons in the slums and outskirts of Rajkot city and in 8 villages of Rajkot district.

*Karnataka · Ponnampet:* 600 blankets and 300 shawls to 656 families of 21 villages in Kodagu district.

*West Bengal · Cooch Behar:* 3,507 kg rice, 1,261 kg dal, 948 kg chira, 45 kg *batasa*, 30 kg sugar, and 250,000 halogen tablets to 1,895 persons belonging to 4 villages of Mathabhanga and Tufanganj subdivisions in Cooch Behar district.

*Bangladesh · Faridpur:* 1,500 kg chira and 250 kg sugar to 500 families of Faridpur.

## **Distress Relief**

**Ramakrishna Mission, Narottam Nagar**, distributed 500 mosquito nets and 220 school uniforms to people of nearby areas. **Ramakrishna Math, Nat-tarampalli**, distributed 1,154 sets of school uniform cloth and various stationery items to poor students of nearby schools.